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The Corporeality of Trauma, Memory, and Resistance: Writing the Body in Contemporary Fiction from Chile and Argentina

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The Corporeality of Trauma, Memory, and Resistance: Writing the Body in Contemporary Fiction from Chile and Argentina

by

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Dedication

In loving memory of Marianne Tille,

Georgette Wandfluh, and Madeleine Tille.

To Tristan and Justine.

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The Corporeality of Trauma, Memory, and Resistance:
Writing the Body in Contemporary Fiction from Chile and Argentina

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This dissertation looks at the representation and impact of gendered violence in the novel *Pasos bajo el agua (*1986) and in the short stories in *Ofrenda de propia piel* (2004) by Argentine author and former political prisoner Alicia Kozameh (b. 1953), as well as in *Jamás el fuego nunca* (2007) and *Impuesto a la carne* (2010), two novels by Chilean writer Diamela Eltit (b. 1949). By examining the particular expressions of physical and psychological pain in the aforementioned texts, I demonstrate that Kozameh and Eltit write the female body to simultaneously represent a corporeality that, until recently, has rarely been expressed in literature, and reconstruct a body that has been traumatized by state-sponsored violence and by what could be considered economic violence. Both of them denounce violence, torture, disappearances, exile, and indifference to justice as painful events that not only damage the spirits of the victims, but that are also inscribed upon the physical body. I also show how each author addresses the overlapping of individual and collective traumatic memories and how these are felt in the body as well. Finally, I argue that writing the materiality of the lived body, from its vulnerability to its resilience, provides for Kozameh and Eltit valuable insight into the ways in which female bodies are able to resist and reassess the meaning imposed on them by legally-endorsed and non-official systems of oppression. Their work thus has direct

social relevance that goes beyond feminism's countering of male dominance and women's rights. Yet, I also show that they manifest their feminist commitment by using the voice and body of female subjects to incorporate marginalized Chilean and Argentine bodies into the linguistic realm in order to provide a fuller understanding of female corporeality in Latin America.

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Introduction

In recent years, the Chilean government's interests and financial support of Santiago's vibrant cultural scene have been remarkable and have contributed to what some consider to be the cultural rebirth of Chile's capital city. The construction of the impressive Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center, inaugurated in 2010 on the site of the historically controversial Diego Portales' building,[1] was financed by the state and epitomizes Santiago's thriving cultural landscape. Recent private initiatives have also contributed to the city's booming cultural scene, which consists of over fifty theatrical venues, numerous art cinema theaters, galleries and literary cafés. Yet, despite the abundance of cultural events that took place in Santiago in 2013, relatively few venues organized or promoted any type of artistic commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the September 11, 1973 military coup that violently ousted democratically-elected socialist president Salvador Allende Gossens and gave absolute power to General Augusto Pinochet.[2] This is in part owing to the fact that, to this day, the 1973 coup and the dictatorship period that lasted until 1990 still divide a nation that witnessed a sizeable number of its citizens being jailed, tortured, and killed by its own government and by compatriots who supported the military regime.

The tensions between those who seek justice for the atrocities that occurred during the dictatorship and those who prefer to forget these sinister times were obvious

[1] "This building, like no other, has been a major player during a period in Chile's recent history that was characterized by political and social division. The building was built as a masterpiece and symbol of the 'new man' during Salavador Allende's government. After the coup in 1973 this building housed General Pinochet's regime embodying the 'Total Power.' During the last three decades four governments have occupied the building including the Ministry of Defense" (http://www.archdaily.com/81725).

[2] Among the few venues organizing artistic events for the 40th anniversary of the coup was the Centro Cultural Matacuna 100, which held a writing workshop called "Dramaturgia colectiva 40 años de golpe" from October 4 to November 30, 2013, as well as a commemoration event on September 11, 2013, and a play called "Cienfuegos 39" that explored the dangers of clandestine activism during the dictatorship.

on the actual 40th anniversary date of September 11, 2013. While many Chileans honored the memories of those who disappeared and denounced the human rights abuses that occurred under Pinochet through peaceful demonstrations in the streets of Santiago and other cities, Chile's sitting conservative president, Sebastián Piñera, publicly blamed the 1973 coup and the repression that followed on the Allende government that, in his words, "quebrantó la legalidad y el Estado de derecho" ("Piñera" n. pag.).[3] The call he made that day on Chilean citizens to overlook their past traumas and look toward the future also highlights a long-lasting and widespread attitude among politicians and part of the population to forget and ignore their country's violent past in the name of reconciliation: "La actual generación no debe traspasar a sus hijos y nietos los mismos odios y querellas" ("Piñera" n.pag.).

In Argentina, where state terrorism against perceived leftist dissidents raged between 1976 and 1983, such divisions between remembering and forgetting, justice and impunity, victims and victimizers have also subsisted. During this period, known as the Dirty War, the Argentine military government kidnapped, tortured, and disappeared thousands of its own citizens. In contrast to the Chilean experience, however, Argentine society appears better prepared in 2014 to openly address contentious topics related to the Dirty War. Recent national debates have included, for example, the legacy of state violence on the children of perceived dissidents stolen by the regime and placed in military families, as well as the state-mandated identification of remains found in mass graves using current DNA testing methods. Argentine society's willingness to confront its violent past is due to a variety of factors, including the relentless public actions of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and other human rights groups who have been seeking and

[3] In 2010, Sebastian Piñera, a billionaire businessman and former Professor of Economics, became the first right-wing president to be elected in Chile after the dictatorship ended in 1990.

demanding justice for their loved ones since 1977, the early efforts of Raúl Alfonsín's government (1983-89, the first to be democratically-elected postdictatorship) to denounce and prosecute those responsible for the atrocities that occurred during the Dirty War, the political actions of former president Néstor Kirchner who, in 2006, overturned impunity laws introduced by Carlos Menem's government (1989-99) to protect former military leaders, as well as the 2012 convictions and life sentences given to former dictators Jorge Videla and Reynaldo Bignone for the numerous murders and human rights violations that they both ordered during their respective tenure as de facto presidents.[4] These judicial retributions, although mostly symbolic given the years that had elapsed since the dictatorship period ended and these men's old age at the time of sentencing, did not occur in Chile prior to Pinochet's natural death as a free and still somewhat popular man in 2006.[5] Still, in Argentina, as in Chile, predominant national and public discourses about recent state-sponsored violence remain, for many, insufficient, disingenuous, and painful.

As has been the case with other inhumane events, such as the Holocaust, literary fiction became and still is an essential and constructive outlet for writers to reflect publicly upon the occurrence and consequences of recent state-sponsored violence in Argentina and Chile, to articulate traumatic experiences, and to carry on a much needed conversation on matters of memory, trauma, survival, and justice. These topics are at the core of this dissertation project, which focuses on the literary representations of various forms of gendered violence that occurred during and in the aftermath of Argentina's and

[4] General Jorge Rafael Videla came to power in the coup d'état that deposed Isabel Martínez de Perón in 1976 and ruled over Argentina until 1981. He died in prison on May 17, 2013. Reynaldo Bignone served as de facto president from July 1982 to December 1983. As of January 2014, he is the only former dictator who ruled during the Dirty War to be alive and serving a life sentence.

[5] In his September 11, 2013's article covering the 40th anniversary of the military coup, Gideon Long of the BBC News reported that "When Gen. Pinochet died in 2006, about 60,000 people turned up to file past his coffin and pay their respects. Some were in tears. Others clutched bronze busts and photographs of the general." He also added that to this day, there is still a museum honoring Pinochet's memory in Santiago. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-24014501.

Chile's recent dictatorships, and especially of the impact that such violence has had on female bodies. I specifically look at the novel *Pasos bajo el agua (*1986) and at the short stories in *Ofrenda de propia piel* (2004) by Argentine author and former political prisoner Alicia Kozameh (b. 1953), as well as at *Jamás el fuego nunca* (2007) and *Impuesto a la carne* (2010), two novels by Chilean writer Diamela Eltit (b. 1949).

By examining the particular expressions of physical and psychological pain in the aforementioned texts, I demonstrate that Eltit and Kozameh denounce how state-sponsored gendered violence, torture, disappearances, exile, and indifference to justice are painful events that not only damage the spirits of the victims, but are also inscribed upon the physical body. I also show how each author addresses the overlapping of individual and collective traumatic memories and how these are felt in the body as well. Furthermore, I argue that writing the materiality, vulnerability, and resilience of the lived body for Eltit and Kozameh provides valuable insight into the ways in which female bodies are able to resist and reassess the meaning imposed on them by legally-endorsed and non-official systems of oppression and thus has direct social relevance that goes beyond feminism's countering male dominance and the specificity of women's rights. Yet, I also show that they manifest their feminist commitment by using the voice and body of female subjects to incorporate marginalized Chilean and Argentine bodies into the linguistic realm in order to provide a fuller understanding of female corporeality in Latin America.

In the context of this project, the term "gendered violence" refers to methods used predominantly by men to inflict physical pain onto women's bodies by specifically targeting their biological identity as female and by counting on the emotional suffering that such methods will cause. These include rape, sexual assault, forced abortions, physical violence during pregnancy, life-threatening delivery conditions, permanent

physical separation from one's newborn infant, and other torture methods that target women's breasts, genitalia, and reproductive organs. During the Dirty War and the Pinochet regime, this type of violence served to break down perceived dissident female bodies and subjectivities, as well as to maintain structural gender inequalities.

Since the primary focus of my study is on female corporeality, I specifically look at gendered violence against women. However, I would like to point out that men were not spared from torture and violence, a fact that Eltit highlights in her representation of the main male protagonist in *Jamás el fuego nunca,* which I will discuss in part of Chapter Three. Rapes and other types of sexual violence against male dissidents by military personnel were common and, in societies such as Argentina and Chile that highly value masculinity, these acts were used as ultimate forms of humiliation and domination.

Eltit and Kozameh are not the only Chilean and Argentine authors to denounce, through fiction, the extreme violence that occurred during the recent dictatorships and to expose the effects of traumatic experiences on individual and collective memory. In Argentina, renowned writers like Marta Traba, Griselda Gambaro, Luisa Valenzuela, Tununa Mercado, Manuela Fingueret, and Ricardo Piglia, among many others, have treated, in their narrative, topics such as repression, trauma, and memory, during and in the aftermath of the Dirty War.[6] Similarly, various Chilean authors, including José Donoso, Carlos Cerda, and Ariel Dorfman, among others, have fictionalized such issues in relation to the traumatic period of the Pinochet regime.[7]

Some of these writers have also specifically denounced gendered violence and its impact on female subjectivity in the contexts of the recent Chilean and Argentine

[6] See for example *Conversación al Sur* (1981) by Marta Traba, *En estado de memoria* (1990) by Tununa Mercado (1990), *Respiración artificial* (1980) by Ricardo Piglia, *Cambio de armas* by Luisa Valenzuela, *Ganarse la muerte* by Griselda Gambaro (1976), and *Hija del silencio* (1999) by Manuela Fingueret.
[7] See for example *Morir en Berlin* (1993) by Carlos Cerda, *Viudas* (1981) by Ariel Dorfman, and *Casa de Campo* (1978) y *El jardín de al lado* (1981) by José Donoso.

dictatorships. In *Conversación al Sur* (1981) for example, Argentine author Marta Traba focuses on the experiences of women involved in leftist radical activities and denounces gendered violence through clear descriptions of torture methods, including how one of the main protagonists lost her unborn child after prison guards jumped on her pregnant abdomen and brutally violated her with a stick. In her short story "Cambio de armas" (1983), Argentine writer Luisa Valenzuela describes how a military colonel punishes Laura, a leftist guerilla member, through torture, humiliation, and rape, sadistically forcing her to be his lover and making her dependent upon him. Finally, in his 1990 play *La muerte y la doncella*, Chilean author Ariel Dorfman tells the dramatic story of Paulina Salas, who was tortured and raped during a repressive military regime and who, years later, has to unexpectedly face her torturer again when her husband, unaware of her traumatic past, invites that man into their home. While these texts and various others openly address the gendered violence that many women experienced during the Chilean and Argentine military regimes, they do not specifically focus on the materiality of the female body in the same organic and essential way as do those of Eltit and Kozameh. As I will show in this study, the body becomes the crucial site from where, simultaneously, both authors are able to address extreme gendered violence and their characters manage to resist and survive such traumatic experiences.

Furthermore, most narrative that deals with gender violence during and in the aftermath of the military regimes do so in ways that either include explicit descriptions of torture scenes and wounds (as in Traba's aforementioned novel and most testimonios), or represent the female body in erotic terms as a primarily sexualized object (as in Valenzuela's short story). As I will explain in Chapter One, Kozameh and Eltit for the most part approach female corporeality as a non-erotic entity and refer to the physical violence perpetrated against their female protagonists primarily through subtle allusions,

leaving the reader unsure about what actually happened to them. Such narrative choices demonstrate the difficulty that many trauma survivors face when telling their story, but they also allow for the exposure of female bodies that are neither idealized, nor repulsive, resulting, to some extent, in the portrayal of a more common and realistic type of human body.

This project is in part motivated by what I believe is a need for a deeper understanding of the particular conditions under which current Argentine and Chilean feminist fiction writing is shaped by the recent violence that occurred during the dictatorships and of how it is developing in the aftermath. When I first began thinking about the topic of this study, it was my intention to use a methodological framework based mostly on semiotic and cultural aspects of gender and of female bodies put forward by so-called French feminist theorists to examine the ways in which women authors write the female body in Latin America.[8] I quickly became aware that, while French feminism is a useful approach to denounce and resist phallologocentric thought, its focus on gender inequalities offers limited applications in a complex South American context where race and class inequalities are often perceived to be more important than those of gender, and where newly redemocratized societies are still coming to terms with the traumatic memories of recent violent dictatorships, as well as with the outcomes of drastic neoliberal policies. Still, while various scholars, including Sara Castro-Klarén and Amy Kaminsky, pointed to the inadequacies of applying French feminist theory in such context and have rightly noted that Latin American women authors write the body for reasons that transcend gender equality, few have looked in detail at the significance that texts such as those highlighted in this study bear for Latin American feminist thought.

[8] I refer mostly to the philosophies and politics of Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, who despite the uniqueness of their particular approaches, are each seeking to free women from oppressive phallologocentric thought by focusing on semiotic and cultural aspects of gender and of the female body.

Indeed, by writing the materiality of the female body as the main referent in their texts, Eltit and Kozameh are not only able to expose an array of issues that include human rights violations, disability, race, class and gender inequalities, but they also empower female bodies with the potential to resist them or to be and find the collective solution for these issues.

This portrayal of female bodies as being simultaneously vulnerable and creative led me to combine two methodological approaches. The primary methodology that I will employ is textual analysis, including analyses of female corporeality as presented in the novels and short stories, and analyses of narrative techniques. These examinations will be carried out in conjunction with a theoretical view that draws from a wide range of disciplines, namely philosophy, gender theory, trauma theory, cultural theory, and literary criticism, so as to enlarge the discussion about what it means to write female bodies for contemporary authors such as Kozameh and Eltit in a postcolonial, post-dictatorial, neoliberal Southern Cone context. This interdisciplinary approach enables me to carefully consider intertwined issues of trauma and memory that are prevalent in post-dictatorship literature from the Southern Cone and that are closely related to the body and to physical experiences. Finally, this allows me to examine the complex structures of analysis that are formulated by Eltit and Kozameh in their narrative, without subordinating it to one theory or forgoing a close reading of their texts in favor of a theoretical one.

The abundance of fiction and non-fiction narrative that has been published to date about recent state-sponsored violence in Chile and Argentina and about the impact that these traumatic events have had and continue to have in both societies has also produced

a vast critical bibliography related to the literary representations of trauma and memory.[9] My theoretical approach to memory and trauma as represented by Eltit and Kozameh has been mostly influenced by scholars whose analytical focus is primarily philosophical and cultural. Nelly Richard's reflections on the potential of art in post-dictatorship Chile in *Residuos y metáforas: ensayos de crítica cultural sobre el Chile de la Transición* (1998) and on the role of memory in *Crítica de la memoria* (2010), as well as her insightful observations of Eltit's work over the years in relation to Chile's dictatorial and postdictatorial experiences in particular, were critical to my reading of Eltit's novels. Similarly, the analytical work of Idelber Avelar in *The Untimely Present* (1999) and that of Luis Cárcamo-Huechante in *Tramas del mercado: imaginación económica, cultura pública y literatura en el Chile de fines de siglo veinte* (2007) were decisive in my understanding and analysis of how the postdictatorial free-market societies in both countries are negotiating their traumatic memories. Yet, the sociological approaches of Fernando Reati in *Nombrar lo innombrable* (1992) and that of Barbara Sutton in *Bodies in Crisis: Violence, and Women's Resistance in Neoliberal Argentina* (2010) were also useful to my project. Reati's exploration on how authors write about the violence that occurred during the Dirty War has informed my analysis of the representations of traumatic experiences in Kozameh's and Eltit's narrative. Finally, I found Sutton's concerns with current body politics in neoliberal Argentina to be valid for Chile's free-market society, which uses similar forms of oppression to marginalize certain types of bodies.

[9] Notable examples of recently published analyses that focus on representations of the violent dictatorships and their impact in the fictional work of some prominent Argentine and Chilean authors include: *In Silencio, trauma y esperanza: novelas chilenas de la dictadura 1977-2010* (2013) by Mario Lillo Cabezas, *A partir del trauma: narración y memoria en Traba, Peri Rossi y Eltit* (2012) by Gloria Medina-Sancho, and *National Trauma in Postdictatorship Latin American Literature Chile and Argentina* (2009) by Irene Wirshing.

THE AUTHORS AND THEIR TEXTS

Alicia Kozameh was a twenty-three year old university student when she was taken prisoner in 1975 by the Alianza Anti-Comunista Argentina (AAA) for her involvement with the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores, a leftist political group. Although her arrest occurred a few months before the 1976 military coup, Isabelita Perón's government had already implemented a state of siege and launched an official and ruthless paramilitary campaign against perceived leftist revolutionaries. She spent the next three years imprisoned before being released on probation in 1978 and ultimately forced into exile in 1980. In her first novel *Pasos bajo el agua* (1986) and in the short stories compiled in *Ofrenda de propia piel* (2004), Kozameh recounts, through fiction, some of her traumatic experiences, including the terrifying circumstances of her arrest, the abuse, torture, and degrading conditions she suffered and witnessed during her years in prison, and the subsequent long-lasting emotional difficulties she faced upon her release and in exile. Although heavily inspired by Kozameh's own life events, both texts offer various points of view, are composed of several forms of discourses, and are for the most part narrated by a fictional character named Sara.

Since their respective publications, various scholars have written critically about *Pasos bajo el agua* and about some of the stories in *Ofrenda de propia piel*, especially "Bosquejo de Alturas."[10] Several of these analyses are included in Edith Dimo's *Escribir una generación*: *la palabra de Alicia Kozameh* (2005) and focus on the testimonial aspect of those texts as representations of a collective memory. In "*Pasos bajo el agua* y 'Bosquejo de Alturas' de Alicia Kozameh: Tortura, resistencia y secuelas," Cynthia Tompkins notes for example that "la novedad de la obra de Kozameh estriba en la

[10] This short story includes many of the protagonists of *Pasos bajo el agua*. In an interview with Gwendolyn Díaz, Kozameh states that "'Bosquejo de Alturas' could have very well been another chapter of this novel. But I chose to publish it separately because it was conceived as a short story" (318).

interconexión en la vertiente testimonial y la ficción, entre la denuncia de la violación de los derechos humanos y el examen de sus secuelas" (14). Most critics have also underlined the exceptionally vivid and creative way in which Kozameh portrays the materiality of the body. Francine Masiello explains, for example, that "En 'Bosquejo de Alturas' el 'sujeto plural' se articula mediante referencias al cuerpo femenino como metáfora de la nación" (164), while Rhonda Dahl Buchanan states that Kozameh's "lenguaje se caracteriza sobre todo por su cualidad visceral" and refers to her writing as an "escritura corporal" (495).

I find this "corporal" aspect of Kozameh's prose especially compelling because it allows her not only to creatively articulate her traumatic experiences and those of others, as the above critics have noted, but also to write the insubordinate female body as a way to denounce and resist traumatic violence and the various ways in which Latin American women's bodies in general are sites of control. Therefore, my analysis expands on the observation that Kozameh's writing is essentially "corporal" and explores in detail the representation of the lived female body in the aforementioned texts. By doing so, I demonstrate that her writing complicates the meanings that have been assigned to the female body by the military regime and by society, thus powerfully articulating that the potential for survival, resistance, and healing from traumatic experiences and repression is rooted within the body itself.

Various scholars who have studied Kozameh's *Pasos bajo el agua*, including Buchanan and Victoria Cox, have described it as testimonio literature, a genre in which a first-person narrator recounts a significant authentic life event, and have compared it to Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School,* published first in English in 1986, and to Nora Strejilevich's *Una sola muerte numerosa* (1997). Partnoy and Strejilevich, like Kozameh, suffered detention and torture during the Dirty War and wrote about their traumatic

experiences in a way that blends facts with fiction. Their prose, however, does not focus on corporeality in the same organic and visceral ways that Kozameh's does.

While I will explain in greater detail the impact of Kozameh's writing as fictionalized testimonio in Chapter Two, traditional testimonio literature about the Dirty War and the Pinochet regime have been extremely useful to my understanding of the processes through which trauma affects memory and I will give a brief overview of some of the most important examples of such literature. Before doing so, however, I would like to point out that testimonios have also been critical to my realization of the extreme physical and emotional suffering inflicted by the military regimes in Chile and Argentina on perceived dissidents and of the atrocities committed during those dark times. The graphic descriptions of the unthinkable and inhumane ways in which the regimes tortured many prisoners that appeared in the many non-fictionalized testimonies I read for this project made it possible for me to better detect Kozameh's and Eltit's subtle yet powerful allusions to physical violence and to appreciate how both authors write pain in ways that are not solely isolated onto the body. I am humbled by the moving testimonies that I read and would like to acknowledge here my respect for those who experienced the tyranny of the military regimes and my admiration for the courage it must have taken them to recount their suffering.

Among the most important collective testimonios on the Dirty War and the Pinochet regime are the official reports published by commissions created by the post-dictatorship governments in Chile and Argentina to investigate, document, and denounce some of the crimes perpetrated during the military regimes. In Argentina, the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons published its famous report entitled *Nunca Más* in 1984, which includes transcriptions of oral testimonies by numerous individuals

who were tortured during the Dirty War. In Chile, the 1991 *Rettig Report*[11] and the 2004 *Valech Report*[12] released by the National Commission for Truth and Conciliation record, based on oral testimonies by over 25,000 victims, some of the abuses committed during the Pinochet regime.[13]

Besides these official reports, several testimonios by individuals were published in both countries during and following the dictatorships. Jacobo Timerman's *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número* (1980) is undoubtedly one of the best-known testimonios about Argentina's Dirty War. Timerman's account, which he published from exile in Israel in 1980, details the persecution and torture experiences that he endured at the hands of the military junta while imprisoned between 1977 and 1978. In similar fashion, Luz Arce's controversial *El infierno* (1993) recounts her traumatic ordeal during the Pinochet regime in Chile, including her abduction for being a socialist militant, as well as how she was tortured, raped, shot, and forced to collaborate with the regime, becoming subsequently a formal employee of the dictatorship's intelligence agency (DINA).

In contrast to Kozameh's fiction, and as will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Two, these non-fictionalized testimonios describe the details of the rites of torture. Given that in these texts the physical takes center stage and appears detached from any emotional state, they offer an approach to the wounded body distinct to that of Kozameh's, which shows the complex ways in which her main character unites her traumatized body and mind.

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[11] *The Rettig Report: Report of the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation* (Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación), 1991. Available at: http://www.usip.org/files/resources/collections/truth_commissions/Chile90-Report/Chile90-Report.pdf

[12] *The Valech Report: Report of the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture* (Comisión Nacional Sobre Prisón Politica y Tortura), 2004. Available at: http://www.comisionprisionpoliticaytortura.cl/listado_informes.html

[13] Many oral and written testimonies are also available at the Museo de la Memoria y de los Derechos Humanos inaugurated in Santiago in 2010 to commemorate the human rights violations committed between 1973 and 1990.

I believe that Eltit's fiction is also deeply rooted in the author's own life-changing experience when in 1973, at the age of twenty-four, she witnessed Allende's brutal overthrow by the military junta and subsequently lived in fear for many years, as did most Chileans during the military regime. As an engaged intellectual, performer, and writer with liberal convictions, Eltit was especially vulnerable to the Pinochet government's repression and censorship. While she did not personally experience physical violence, she saw many of her friends and fellow Chilean artists being taken prisoner by the military and, in some cases, disappearing forever. In 1979, she co-founded the Colectivo de Acciones de Arte (CADA) to undermine the social conditioning of the Pinochet regime through avant-garde art actions.

During the time she was involved with CADA, Eltit published her first novel *Lumpérica* (1983), a highly experimental and fragmented text, whose content defies Pinochet's regime in part by including sexual and torture scenes. From *Lumpérica* until her most recent novel to date, *Fuerzas especiales* (2013), Eltit's fiction incorporates themes and language that convey and denounce the various types of violence and processes of social marginalization that have taken place in Chile during and in the aftermath of Pinochet's regime.

Over time, many literary critics and scholars have offered original and complex analyses of Eltit's work, opening up opportunities for new readings and recognizing her significant contribution to Chilean letters. Among those first scholars who were especially receptive to Eltit's narrative in Chile and paved the way for the abundant and diverse studies of her work published to date are Eugenia Brito, Nelly Richard, Rodrigo Cánovas, and Raquel Olea.[14]

[14] See for example Brito's *Campos minados: literatura post-golpe en Chile* (1990), Richard's *La insubordinación de los signos* (1994), Cánovas' "Apuntes sobre la novela *Por la patria* (1986) de Diamela Eltit" (1990), and Olea's "El cuerpo-mujer, un recorte de lectura en la narrativa de Diamela Eltit" (1993).

Eltit has also received positive critical attention from many Latin Americanists in the United States. While literary critic Jean Franco is often credited with having introduced Eltit's fiction to an international audience, various North American-based scholars including Francine Masiello, Mary-Beth Tierney-Tello, and Mary Louise Pratt were among the first to write critically about Eltit's work and to introduce some of her novels to their students.[15] The aforementioned Chilean and North American scholars, as well as the majority of others who have studied Elit's work in recent years, have generally focused on a combination of the following main topics: 1) Eltit's deconstruction of hegemonic power; 2) her representations of marginal subjectivities (especially female) and urban spaces; 3) her aesthetics (sometimes characterized as neobaroque); and 4) her exploration of authoritarian repression and of the political and economic policies that were implemented under dictatorship and that remain institutionalized in democratic Chile. While this study too looks at these different aspects of Eltit's work, it is the first one to connect them to her representations of the wounded female body in *Jamás el fuego nunca* and in *Impuesto a la carne.*

As of 2013, there is an ever-growing number of literary analyses of Eltit's fiction, which, as Mary Green notes, "indicate the richness of her novels and the manifold interpretations that they invite" (21). While I cannot list here the many valuable assessments of Eltit's work published over the years, I will briefly mention those analyses that were most influential to my understanding of Eltit's approach to the female body, a topic that has been recurrent and significant in most of her novels to date.

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[15] See for example Franco's *An Introduction to Spanish-American Literature* (1994), Tierney-Tello's "Re-Making the Margins: From Subalterity to Subjectivity in Diamela Eltit's *Por la patria*," (1992), Pratt's "Overwriting Pinochet: Undoing the Culture of Fear in Chile" (1996), and Masiello's *El arte de la transición* (2001).

In *Jamás el fuego nunca* (2007), readers are introduced to an unnamed aging couple of former Marxist militants, whose daily life is spent mostly cloistered in their apartment and revolves around memories of their past clandestine political involvement, the tragic death of her son years ago, and their present physical and emotional suffering, a result, for the most part, of their having been tortured and of their ineffective political activism during the dictatorship. On four occasions, the female character-narrator also recounts in graphic details her work as a home caregiver to dying elderly patients, including the way she assists them with bathing and incontinence issues. Physical pain and deterioration, as well as emotional torment, are at the core of this novel and I argue that it is through the suffering of her characters and their embodied memories, that Eltit narrates the silenced version of Chile's dictatorial past and the difficulties for some to move on from the traumas they experienced and to accept the free-market capitalist nature of present-day Chilean society.

José Antonio Rivera Soto's argument that the main protagonists are living in a paradoxical temporal exile blinded in part by a defunct Marxist ideology was helpful to my interpretation of the deterioration of the male protagonist's body as a symbol of the decline and ultimate worldwide collapse of Marxism as a liberating project.[16] Furthermore, María Inés Lagos' examination of how the narrative voice expresses intimacy by constantly referring to the body and illness was especially useful to my own gendered and detailed approach to physical and emotional pain, as well as to the topic of ageing as represented in *Jamás el fuego nunca*.[17] I agree with her conclusion that Eltit's emphasis on corporeality engages readers to think not only about the variety of

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[16] See Rivera-Soto's "La muerte del tiempo útopico en *Jamás el fuego nunca* de Diamela Eltit" (2009).
[17] See Lagos' "Subjetividades corporalizadas: 'Maldito amor' de Rosario Ferré y *Jamás el fuego nunca* de Diamela Eltit" (2010).

experiences that women go through, but also about the historical, cultural, and corporeal aspects of female subjectivity (106), and believe this observation to be equally valid for Eltit's subsequent novel *Impuesto a la carne*.

Physical trauma and its devastating effects are also at the center of *Impuesto a la carne* (2010) which narrates the life experiences of an unnamed mother and her daughter who have been living in a hospital since their common birth two hundred years ago. The daughter, who literally carries her mother within her own body, narrates the physical abuses that they both endure at the hands of unethical white male doctors and their staff, who profit from exploiting their racialized female bodies. While this story can be read as an allegory of the past two hundred years of Chilean history, I argue that the physical and economic violence depicted in the novel characterize the brutal and dehumanizing practices that occurred during the military regime, as well as the current neoliberal economic policies, initially implemented by Pinochet, that discriminate against and are dependent upon the exploitation of perceived marginal human bodies to thrive.

Given its recent publication in 2010, very few studies of *Impuesto a la carne* have been published to date. Amongst them however, is Dianna Niebylski's insightful essay "Blood Tax: Violence and the Vampirized Body in *Impuesto a la carne*" (2011), which touches on a variety of different topics. Her take on the mechanisms of hidden sociopolitical violence in the novel and the close link she sees between the constant isolation that the mother and daughter are made to feel and their anarchist inclination, have helped me contextualize the novel. Nevertheless, my allegorical reading focuses on the past forty years of Chile's history while hers encompasses a broader period and does not center specifically on female corporeality.

As with Kozameh's work, I find Eltit's vivid portrayal of the lived body and her articulation of physical pain in those two novels extremely forceful. In her analysis of

Eltit's *El cuarto mundo* (1988), a novel that recounts in part the experience of pregnancy through the viewpoints of a male fetus and his twin sister, Bernadita Llanos eloquently notes that: "la visibilización del cuerpo femenino aparece dentro de un discurso antimimético que lo despoja de las capas ideológicas y linguísticas que lo han recubierto. En este sentido, el cuerpo es un territorio material y simbólico en el cual se manifiestan los diversos sistemas de poder" (105). This observation could easily be applied to many of Eltit's novels, including those under analysis in this project. First, the main, yet marginalized, protagonist-narrators in both texts are female. Secondly, the materiality of the female body appears as a predominant preoccupation in both novels and the characters are especially aware of their physicality. Finally, female corporeality is described in non-erotic terms, which is an aspect of Eltit's writing that sets *Jamás el fuego nunca* and *Impuesto a la carne* apart from most of her previous novels, as well as from most contemporary fiction from the Southern Cone that focuses on the female body, as I will explain in Chapter One.

In both novels, female sexuality is portrayed almost entirely through allusions of sexual abuses, rapes, and physical exploitation that leave and maintain the female characters traumatized and in constant pain. Eltit's representation of female corporeality in these novels therefore contrasts with the erotic and maternal bodies from her earlier novels that defy social norms and expectations through transgressive sexual desires and actions, some considered to be taboo. In *Lumpérica* (1983) for example, the protagonist, L. Iluminada, venerates prostitutes and, at some point is presumed to be masturbating in a public plaza. In *El cuarto mundo* (1988) and *Los trabajadores de la muerte* (1998), the author includes scenes of incest planned by female protagonists. In *Vaca Sagrada* (1991), eroticism is channeled in part through lesbian relations, masturbation, and masochistic behavior.

Furthermore, while both novels include powerful representations of motherhood, the maternal body and maternal bond are not represented as transgressively as in many of her earlier works. Borrowing from psychoanalytical theory, Mary Green argues in *Diamela Eltit: Reading the Mother* (2007) that, in Eltit's first six novels published between 1983 and 1998, "the maternal body is portrayed as a terrain of semiotic pulses and affects that can and will rupture symbolic structures to open up maternal and feminine subjectivity to a rich variety of interpretations that are potentially empowering for all women, and not just mothers" (153). This is somewhat true for the representation of the maternal body in *Impuesto a la carne,* which 1) highlights the maternal body's potential for resistance and meaningful connections with others; 2) is reminiscent of Julia Kristeva's concept of the Chora;[18] and 3) portrays a daughter "pregnant" with her own mother and thus goes against established and natural laws of pregnancy. Yet, in contrast to the novels under study in Green's book, the maternal body in *Impuesto a la carne* appears devoid of erotic desires and the text portrays pregnancy in part as a physical disability. Furthermore, in *Jamás el fuego nunca*, the maternal body appears to indicate the impossibility of the main female character breaking free from societal norms and expectations about motherhood. The embodied memories of her child's conception, his birth, and his premature death keep her in a state of intense melancholic pain that enables her to verbalize her suffering, but does not empower her to move past it.

Throughout this project, I have been aware of the unlikely positioning of Kozameh's and Eltit's narrative side by side. As evidenced in the previous pages, the

[18] Kristeva regards "the shared location of mother and child during gestation as the site of primary symbiotic relationship, a process without a subject which lies ultimately outside patriarchal influence because of that absence of subjectivity" and calls it the Chora. In her view, "it will be subject to various degrees of repression and remains only within language in the form of contradiction, meaninglessness, disruption, silence, and absence" (Herbert McAvoy 31).

recognition that each of these authors has received for her work in general does not compare. Indeed, while Eltit's name is well-known and her prolific work has been recognized in Chile, as well as in literary and academic circles internationally, Kozameh's fame as an author, the extent of her creation and the diffusion of her narrative in Argentina and abroad, as well as the number of critical studies published about her work, have been more modest. Furthermore, the literary genre and writing style of the texts under analysis in this dissertation differ greatly; Kozameh's fictionalized testimonios are written in a for the most part realistic mode and based on true events, while Eltit's prose is highly allegorical and depicts, especially in the case of *Impuesto a la carne*, a partially fantastic world in which time and some corporal experiences do not follow universal laws. Finally, there is a notable lapse of time between the publication dates of *Pasos bajo el agua* in 1986, only three years after the end of the dictatorship in Argentina, and that of the other texts under analysis in this project, which were published in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Yet, I find that the continuity of Kozameh's approach to the wounded lived body between *Pasos bajo el agua* in 1986 and *Ofrenda de propia piel* in 2004 offers a powerful representation of the inevitable changes that bodies go through in the processes of surviving and remembering traumatic experiences. Similarly, Eltit's novels published in 2007 and 2010 also tackle the physical and emotional wounds and changes produced by violence, which, as both authors show, do not necessarily heal or disappear despite the passing of time and return to democracy, but can nonetheless potentially lead to deep individual self-awareness and productive communal actions.

Indeed, despite the aforementioned differences, I find important parallels between these authors and their work under analysis in this dissertation. As I mentioned earlier, both writers address, each in her own way, the recent dictatorships that occurred in her

respective country and the traumatic impact that these events have had on individual and collective bodies and memories. While the political and geographical contexts of the Pinochet regime and of the Dirty War are obviously different, there were many similarities between the two dictatorial governments. As I will explain in subsequent chapters, severe human rights violations, disappearances, imprisonment, torture, and censorship occurred on a large scale in both countries. The military juntas in Chile and Argentina both employed a rhetoric of illness and contamination to justify their heinous actions, which included gendered violence against women. The juntas in each country also espoused conservative views on the role and physical appearance of women in society. In addition, in the immediate post-dictatorship eras, the newly democratically-elected governments of both countries failed to provide adequate counseling and medical attention to those who survived emotional and physical traumas. Some prominent Argentine and Chilean politicians demonstrated, at one point or another, a clear disregard for providing justice for the victims of the military regimes by introducing impunity laws that protected the former dictators and their military subordinates from persecution. Finally, both democratic governments supported and expanded neoliberal economic policies that were introduced during the dictatorship periods and that have been instrumental in widening the existing gap between rich and poor, and have thus marginalized an important part of the population. As my subsequent detailed analyses of Eltit's and Kozameh's work will show, both authors demonstrate how the effects of these events are felt in the lived body of their characters and how, in spite of experiencing long lasting physical and emotional pain as a result of them, female corporeality emerges as an opportunity for survival, resistance, and subversion at the individual and community levels.

In fact, it is in the vivid representations of female bodies and of non-erotic corporeal experiences that I find the most compelling points of contact between these texts. These connections arise from the narrative choices that each writer made. For example, despite their different writing style, both offer fragmented descriptions of the body to portray its dehumanization and use sensory details to depict physical and emotional suffering. Likewise, the presence of a first person narrator detailing significant life experiences enhances the "organic forcefulness" of the corporeal descriptions in each of these texts. While it has been established that Kozameh's *Pasos bajo el agu*a and *Ofrenda de propia piel* are fictionalized testimonios and as such are mostly narrated in the first person, Eltit's principal use of a first person narrative voice in *Jamás el fuego nunca* and in *Impuesto a la carne*, as well as the spoken characteristics of their narrations, also give readers a strong impression of listening to a woman testify about her ordeal.

Still, as stated earlier, the common element that compelled me to analyze these texts side by side lies first and foremost in what I believe are original ways to write the wounded female body to at once denounce gendered violence, deconstruct and discredit dominant discourses about women and other marginalized groups in Argentina and Chile, and provide a more reliable view of female bodies allowing for resistance and for the readers to connect with the pain and experiences of the characters. Both authors focus on the materiality of the female body to condemn the violence that occurred during and in the aftermath of the recent dictatorships. By alluding to violent acts against female bodies and by portraying the long-lasting emotional suffering that such brutal behaviors can provoke, both expose traumatic memories of a recent past that until recently were mostly overlooked. They also invite readers to reflect upon human suffering in general and upon the legacy of the violent dictatorships for today's Chilean and Argentine women in particular. Finally, they not only position marginalized and usually silenced Latin

American female bodies at the center of their narrative, but do so in a non-erotic fashion that differs from most representations of Latin American female corporeality, and in a way that considers important markings of class and race in a Southern Cone context. It is thus by writing the body of female subjects that both Eltit and Kozameh manifest their strong feminist commitment, providing a fuller understanding of present female corporeality in Latin America.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

To make my case, I dedicate one chapter to current theoretical and literary approaches to the body, and three chapters to a close reading of Kozameh's and Eltit's aforementioned texts in chronological order of publication. In Chapter One, I first look at Maurice Merleau Ponty's and Michel Foucault's opposed yet complimentary approaches to embodied subjectivity. One one hand, Merleau Ponty's phenomenological view especially informed my understanding of how power is experienced in the body and enlightened my analyses of Eltit's and Kozameh's female characters in the subsequent chapters, especially the way they feel the effects of violence, trauma, pain, and memory. On the other hand, Foucault's assessment of an embodied subjectivity that is historically and discursively constructed by power in a way that identity is neither essential nor natural was especially helpful to understand Eltit's and Kozameh's writing of the material body to expose and condemn the aggression against and the marginalization of their main protagonists. I also specifically look at what it means to write the body in a Latin American context and present a brief overview of the representations of female bodies in recent literature from Latin America to show how Eltit's and Kozameh's portrayals differ from that of other authors from the region. I explain the fundamental connections that I

see between writing the female body to represent a corporeality that, until recently, has rarely been expressed in literature, and to reconstruct a body that has been silenced and traumatized by state violence and continues to be abused by what could be considered economic violence. Finally, I show how Eltit's and Kozameh's focus on the female body allows for connections between the feminine and other marginalized bodies that suffer discrimination and social inequality in Latin America.

Chapter Two focuses specifically on *Pasos bajo el agua* (1986) and *Ofrenda de propia piel* (2004) by Alicia Kozameh. As previously stated, these texts are closely related to each other, which is why I analyze them together. I start with a brief overview of Argentina's Dirty War and its aftermath to understand the political and personal context in which these texts were written. My subsequent close-reading analysis of these works demonstrates how Kozameh portrays the insubordinate lived body as a concurrent site of destruction and reconstruction that enables her to reclaim meaning for herself and other victims of the regime. I also show that her corporeal representations offer a powerful counter-discourse to that of the military and construct a collective feminist consciousness that allows for the brutally silenced Argentine female voice and body to be heard and seen as an agent of her own subjectivity.

In Chapter Three, I look at the different bodies represented in *Jamás el fuego nunca* by Diamela Eltit and concentrate especially on the way gender affects their interpretation and experience of pain. I demonstrate that, through their physical suffering and deterioration, the aging bodies in the novel are on the one hand narrating the silenced version of a painful past in which they physically experienced the end of a socialist utopia and the horror of a brutal dictatorship, while on the other hand representing a present in which for many pain is still a reality and survival a way of life.

In Chapter Four, I show how Diamela Eltit's novel *Impuesto a la carne (2010*) exposes the dependency of the neoliberal model on human bodies in order to function and denounces the violent processes used by the market-state to reproduce a hierarchy of racialized and gendered bodies that has promoted deep social inequalities throughout Chile's history. I also argue that through her writing of the (maternal) body, Eltit offers a glimpse of hope for the emergence of local communities that, through the remembrance of past struggles, survives, resists, and could potentially challenge the globalized neoliberal model and attain the social equality that democracy was supposed to deliver.

To conclude this study, I briefly point to the potential that Kozameh's and Eltit's central focus on wounded yet resistant Argentine and Chilean female bodies has to demarginalize the status of Latin American female bodies who have traditionally been relegated to the margins of literary discourse. I also identify what, I believe, is a logical expansion of my exploration of the literary representation of the lived female body in Argentina's and Chile's contemporary fiction.

Chapter One

The Body

As human beings, everything we do necessarily engages the body. While this is evident for every physical activity, it is also true in less obvious situations, such as when we are sleeping or simply thinking. Yet, in her recent exploration of corporality in everyday life, cultural sociologist Ellen Thomas explains that most of us are inclined to take our body for granted as a "'natural' fact of existence" and our tendency is to go about our daily lives without thinking about our bodily actions in any detail. She also notes that, in Western culture, "the body is construed to be a fairly reliable instrument through which people express and represent their conscious self and individuality." However, illness, trauma, disability, aging, and prolonged imprisonment are all factors that can destabilize the relationship between our body and our conscious self and, when our body is unable to perform as expected or as it used to, our corporeal unawareness is disrupted and our body becomes absolutely present (1).

The state-sponsored brutality and the disappearances that occurred in Argentina during the Dirty War (1976-1983) and in Chile during the authoritarian regime (1973-1990) of Augusto Pinochet purposefully sought to block the social body from self-expression and to silence those individual bodies considered most rebellious. As a result of this violence, the materiality and vulnerability of the body became a central preoccupation for thousands of Chileans and Argentines who feared physical aggression or fell victim to extreme state-sponsored corporal punishment. For many survivors, the distress caused by this violence has had long-lasting and still-present physical and mental repercussions. Furthermore, the remains of those who disappeared were often never found, making it impossible for loved ones to know for sure whether the persons who

disappeared had died, as well as to bury or cremate the deceased properly and respectfully once their fate was known. The absence of a body and not knowing the exact cause of death also complicated their grief as it often delayed the grieving process indefinitely, prolonged the pain, and prevented acceptance and reconciliation. State terror in both countries also gave rise to a "culture of fear" which brought about long-lasting changes in social behaviors. According to Alison Brisk, some of the consequences of this "culture of fear" in Argentine society included "depoliticization and withdrawal, denial, privatization, 'de-enlightment' about authority figures, and the acceptance of 'micro-despotism' in a variety of social environments" (11). These effects ring true for Chile as well where, as Patricia Politzer explains in *Fear in Chile* (first published in Spanish in 1985), "fear took control of Chile and it transformed everything. (…) Through fear, the dictatorship infiltrated our daily lives and fastened itself to us like a barnacle" (xiv). In addition, social isolation, anxiety, and stress triggered a host of long-lasting, health-related issues for many individuals in both countries.

Given theses circumstances, it seems natural that contemporary Southern Cone literature would want to represent the pain that state-sponsored violence inflicted on the bodies of citizens as a central concern. Alicia Kozameh's and Diamela Eltit's narratives are saturated with corporeality and, as my analysis of their works shows, they both write the materiality of the body: 1) to denounce state-sponsored violence and its traumatic effects; 2) to safeguard the collective, yet silenced, memory of those who were killed and abused by the authoritarian regimes; and 3) to resist the oppression and the marginalization of vulnerable populations that took place during and in the aftermath of their countries' recent history. Yet, while their quest for social justice addresses ethical, cultural, and political issues that affect Chilean and Argentine societies at large and are directly connected to their countries' violent past, Kozameh's and Eltit's corporeal

representations focus specifically on female bodies from Argentina and Chile to suggest that: 1) machismo and patriarchy have historically restricted the opportunities for female bodies from Latin America to express themselves; 2) female bodies from Chile and Argentina fell victim to extreme censorship and tremendous gender-specific brutality at the hand of the state during the dictatorships; and 3) the recovery of these female bodies from trauma has been hindered by a male-dominated free-market state whose desire to forget its inconvenient past is stronger than its drive to provide justice. What is especially compelling in Eltit's and Kozameh's fiction is how their corporeal representations show not only that opportunities for resistance and subversion are possible even under what could be perceived as hopeless conditions, but also that these opportunities originate from the very site of oppression, that is, the body itself. Indeed, despite the aforementioned obstacles, the female body takes center stage in their works and defies the expected representations of Latin American women as powerless, passive, or sexualized objects that have prevailed in literature and in popular imagination for so long.

In this chapter, I introduce current theoretical approaches to the body that are useful to my project, and explain why I chose an analytical approach that starts from the body. I give an overview of the ways in which female corporeality has typically been represented in recent Latin American literature and how these trends are connected to historical, cultural, economic, and political contexts. I explain the crucial connections that I see between writing the female body to simultaneously represent a corporeality that, until recently, has rarely been expressed in literature, and to reconstruct a body that has been silenced and traumatized by state violence and continues to be abused by what could be considered economic violence. I also show how this focus on the female body allows for connections between the feminine and other marginalized bodies that suffer discrimination and social inequality in Latin America.

1.1. BODY STUDIES

In the last four decades, new approaches to the human body in the humanities and social sciences have changed our focus on corporeality. Post-positivist developments in social and cultural theory, including feminism, queer theory, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, postmodernism, and social philosophy "have had a considerable impact in moving 'the body' to the center stage of the social sciences," but also in precipitating "a questioning of the traditional (…) approaches upon which sociology had been founded and developed, such as the perceived radical disjuncture between the concepts of culture and nature, logos and eros, mind and body, male and female." These various theoretical interventions challenged "the dualistic thinking upon which the western humanist tradition was predicated" (Thomas 12). In the next few pages, I highlight some of the recent and most influential theoretical approaches that have informed how we think about the body and that helped guide my understanding of corporeality in general and of female bodies in particular in my subsequent literary analyses.

I find Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach to embodiment, as well as Michel Foucault's genealogy of power, extremely useful to understand how the lived body experiences power and how bodies are constructed by power. Merleau Ponty's phenomenology of lived experience locates agency in embodied subjectivity and emphasizes intentionality, assuming "a pre or non-discursive, anonymous, generic body that exists untouched by cultural inscriptions" (Levin 8). For his part, Foucault views the body as an object subjugated to historical sources of power that is "thoroughly and deeply discursive through and through," thus suggesting that the body might lack subjectivity or agency (Levin 9). While Foucault rejects Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on experience as a foundational category in favor of discourse to theorize bodies and identities, Julia Levin

argues that Foucaultian and Merleau-Pontian theories of embodiment can complement each other to "inform a feminist politics of embodiment." Indeed, she convincingly shows that:

> treating the body as discursive (Foucault) does not necessarily entail ignoring its materiality (Merleau-Ponty); that recognizing bodily materiality does not necessarily lead to the pitfalls of anonymity or essentialism; and that describing the body as discursively constituted within networks of power does not entail its docility or lack of agency. (156)

I will thus draw upon some of her findings in "Bodies and Subjects in Merleau-Ponty and Foucault: Towards a Phenomenological/Postructuralist Feminist Theory of Embodied Subjectivity" (2008) and employ arguments from both theorists despite their notorious differences. Furthermore, I am aware that both French philosophers have been criticized by various scholars for their lack of understanding and support of feminist perspectives and causes, as well as for offering theories that are imperfect for women, Eurocentric, and patriarchal (Phelan 421/Salamon n.pag.). However, there are also many feminist scholars who have used Merleau-Ponty's or Foucault's approaches to embodiment as the foundation for their own theories.[19] For my project, I primarily refer to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and Foucault's genealogy because I believe that both experience and discourse are not only necessary to our understanding of embodiment and subjectivity, but also that both play an important role in Kozameh's and Eltit's literary works. As Levin puts it: "experience can be enlightening as a source of information about women and other marginalized or oppressed groups, but their experiences can also be analyzed in terms of the discourse that informs it" (159).

[19] "Some feminists, such as Sonia Kruks, Carol Bigwood, and Gail Weiss, argue that acknowledging and making visible women's experiences is vital to any good feminist theory, while others, such as Judith Butler, Joan Scott, and Judith Grant, claim that because such experiences are always already discursively constituted, they are not 'authentic' or informative about who or what the woman 'really' is and thus provide no epistemological or explanatory privilege in understanding women's oppression" (Levin 115-16).

1.1.1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology: How The Body Experiences Power

While nineteenth-century thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Freud questioned the dualist theories that view mind and body as different kinds of entities, it was the advent of phenomenology in the twentieth century that most vehemently refuted this Cartesian tradition. The works of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), among others, ignited a strong interest in studying the body and in recognizing its central role in the way we experience life. Influenced by Husserl and Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's scholarship on embodiment, especially his arguments in *Phenomenology of Perception* (first published in French in 1945), have been revisited by and useful to many recent studies and theories of the body.[20]

As a phenomenologist and existentialist, Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) draws a crucial distinction between what he calls the "lived body" and the Cartesian conception of the body as an object or a "biological machine" that has been deeply engrained in modern western culture and that is still prevalent in today's western medicine, for example. In his view, one's body is not only a potential object, but it is also a permanent condition of experience: "my body is constantly perceived," yet "it remains marginal to all my perceptions" (90). Thus, as Taylor Carman clarifies:

> The body is neither an internal subject nor a fully external object of experience. Moreover, as embodied perceivers, we do not typically understand ourselves as pure egos standing in a merely external relation to our bodies, (…), instead the

[20] Iris Marion Young's "Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality" (1980) is considered a central essay in the development of an openly feminist phenomenology. In *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (1999), Gail Weiss uses a Merleau-Pontian description of body image as that without which effective bodily movement would be impossible to argue that one cannot distinguish "a 'pure' sense of proprioception or a postural schema from the racialized, gendered, ethnic, and able-bodied body images" (166). In *Visible Identities, Race, Gender, and the Self* (2006), Linda Martín Alcoff offers a phenomenological account that "integrates social identity categories with people's experiences of the bodies of themselves and others. Focussing primarily on raced and gendered identities, she makes clear the way in which bodily features, (colour, hair, nose, breasts, genitals) are invested with a significance which becomes a part of our immediate perceptual experience of them" (Lennon n.pag.).

> body is itself already the concrete agent of all our perceptual acts. In perception, that is, we understand ourselves not as having but as being bodies. (208)

As such, the body is the place "where consciousness and reality in fact come to occupy the very same conceptual space," as well as the place of intersections between one's experiences and those of others (209). Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, reality is essentially partial. As Levin clarifies:

> I have access to my experiences, but not to yours. This does not mean that we each inhabit separate worlds, but that we each have partial and potentially overlapping experiences, each of which is real in the sense that I really do have the perceptual experiences that I have, as do you, but our perceptual experiences might not necessarily coincide. (39)

According to Linda Martín Alcoff, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology provides a useful foundation for a feminist theory of embodiment precisely because of the meaning it assigns to experience. She claims that his phenomenological explanation of experience introduces a better understanding of identities because it focuses on differences and particularities, as well as situatedness, localization, and social and historical influences that shape experiences:

> Merleau-Ponty's account of embodiment provides a nondeterminist, nontransparent account of experience. Experiences matter, but their meaning for us is both ambiguous and dynamic. We are embodied, yet not reduced to physical determinations imagined as existing outside of our place in culture and history. This account helps to capture the dialectics of social identities, in which we are both interpellated into existing categories as well as making them our own. (111)

Gail Weiss also argues that "a richer feminist understanding of how racial, gender, class, age, and cultural differences are *corporeally* registered and reproduced can be achieved" through Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodied subjectivity (10). In her view, it is imperative to recognize that individual, political, and social inequalities are reflected and sustained through body image. If we do not acknowledge the significance of body image, positive social and political changes might not "address the individual's own

corporeal existence in the intimate manner necessary to move successfully toward the eradication of sexism, racism, classism, ageism, and ethnocentrism" (10).

One of Merleau-Ponty's key yet controversial arguments is that all body-subjects to some extent perceive, experience, and interact with the world in certain common, anonymous ways (Levin 64). If we accept that we share a certain extent of bodily similarity with others based on our material commonalities, "we can understand the suffering of others and act to reduce it" and our bodily materiality becomes a source of intersubjectivity (64). Sonia Kruks, who views Merleau-Ponty's anonymous body as potential to build community and resistance, argues that "common experiences of feminine embodiment (…) can furnish what I will call an affective predisposition to act on behalf of women other than and different from oneself: a predisposition toward forms of feminist solidarity" (151) and that "if we are ever to struggle toward wider forms of feminist solidarity, we will do so by being attentive to one another as embodied and affective subjectivities and not only as discursively constructed subjects" (152). She argues for what she calls "feeling-with" as "a means of establishing intersubjective communication and grounding ethical and political relations with others" (in Levin 64). For example, Kruks explains our ability to "feel-with" the pain of others as such:

> We are (…) capable of an immediate intersubjective apprehension of another's experience of pain. This apprehension takes place in the dimension of sentience and is not primarily a function of conscious evaluation or discourse. Moreover, this immediate apprehension does not involve an appropriation of the other in which I claim her suffering as my own or an identification in which I claim I can fully enter into her experience. (166)

As I shall later demonstrate in the novels and short stories that I analyze, Alcoff's previously stated view of experience as a crucial category for understanding one's identity as embodied and socially/historically situated is key to the main female characters' assessment of their specific experiences as victims of state-sponsored

gendered violence, of how they feel these experiences in their bodies, resist them, and seek to heal from them. Kozameh's and Eltit's focus on the corporeal thus testifies to the importance of how their characters experience oppression in their bodies, often times leaving them unable to resort to discursive constructions of what occurred to them and others or, in other instances, in spite of normative powers that silence or belittle these experiences.

Furthermore, both authors portray female body-subjects who retain agency and are able to resist oppression through their bodies, demonstrating as Weiss suggests "that a greater awareness of the 'body power' we have at our disposal through this very plasticity and stability can result in new, perhaps subversive, body images that can be used to fight oppression on a corporeal front" (10). Finally, both authors indicate, to some extent, that communication, solidarity, and resistance to oppression are possible, as Kruks contends, "if one appeals to a material body that exceeds discourse" (in Levin 64). Yet, while Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is useful to understand how the characters experience oppression and resistance, the ways in which Eltit and Kozameh focus on the lived female body also clearly emphasize the disciplinary power that historical, political, social, and cultural discourses exercise on their characters' corporeality.

1.1.2. Michel Foucault's Genealogies: How Power Constructs the Body

Like Merleau-Ponty's work, that of Michel Foucault (1926-1984) rejects Cartesian dualism and has been highly influential in directing attention to the material body. Yet, Foucault's poststructuralist thought contradicts Merleau-Ponty's assumption of a non-discursive generic body, which is the locus of both subjectivity and agency. Indeed, Foucault sees the body as an object constructed by and subjugated to external,

discursive forces, which nonetheless has "the capability to act within power networks to alter and shift relationships of forces in ways that open new spaces and create new possibilities for embodied beings" (Levin 112).

In *Discipline and Punish* (first published in French in 1975) and in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (in French 1976), Foucault studies the history of discursive practices, as well as the function of truth, knowledge, and power in different historical settings. These genealogical works introduce a new paradigm of power, which "infiltrates all aspects of our lives and operates not by seizure, negation and repression, but through ever-shifting and ever-present relationships" (Levin 75).[21] As Foucault explains, this disciplinary power is all-pervading:

> not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. (*History* 93)

In his view, power relationships thus shape every aspect of contemporary society, especially knowledge and embodiment.

Foucault argues "that power produces knowledge (…) that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (*Discipline* 27). This connection between power and knowledge exercises normalizing control over individuals and institutions: "Individuals are situated vis-à-vis norms of mental health, physical health, criminal behavior, sexual behavior, etc., and those who deviate from the norms become

[21] Foucault used the term "geneaology" to refer to "an examination of the causal factors that might contribute to the way in which ideas change and evolve" (Oliver 11).

undesirable, excluded from institutions of truth, knowledge and intelligibility" (Levin 79).

In regards to embodiment, power works to shape the material body into a "useful mechanism by actively constructing and determining its abilities and skills" and thus producing a new type of body (Levin 80). This is what Foucault calls a "docile body," that is, a subject who is controllable and who, for the most part, aligns with and conforms to institutional and societal norms (*History* 138). Discipline and normalization therefore occur "at the level of bodies directly" and "it is bodies (as opposed to immaterial agents) that are the conduits and the effects of power" (Levin 80). Since Foucault implies that the control of bodies is equivalent to the control of subjects, everything about our bodies and subjectivity is the result and means of power (87).

Yet this does not imply that we do not have agency or that we cannot resist oppressive power structures. Indeed, in his later work on technologies of the self, Foucault explains that power offers opportunities for change and transformation:

> For, if it is true that at the heart of power relations and as a permanent condition of their existence there is an insubordination and a certain essential obstinacy on the part of the principles of freedom, then there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight. Every power relationship implies, at least *in potentia*, a strategy of struggle, in which the two forces are not superimposed, do not lose their specific nature, or do not finally become confused. Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal. (*Afterword* 225)[22]

Furthermore, Foucault's genealogy of bodies as constructed by power also demonstrates that there is in fact "no 'natural' body to which to appeal in an effort to separate the 'normal' from the 'abnormal' body" (Levin 89). Thus, as Margaret McLaren

[22] This perception has been applied to the way in which slaves are often represented as without power. Whereas, as Foucault suggests, the slave constitutes a "kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal" for the master.

explains, for Foucault, bodies are also sites of resistance: "bodies are both active and passive; it is bodies that resist and increase their forces through discipline, as well as being shaped by disciplinary practices" (56). Consequently, "even the disciplined, docile body remains (at least potentially) powerful and agentic" (Levin 100). In other words, Foucault demonstrates that identities are fluid rather than fixed, and that freedom and resistance are integral to the very nature of power.

Foucault's assessment of an embodied subjectivity that is historically and discursively constructed by power so that identity is neither essential nor natural is especially helpful to understand Eltit's and Kozameh's writing of the material body to expose and condemn the aggression against and the marginalization of their main protagonists by dominant groups in Chilean and Argentine societies. While Eltit's *Impuesto a la carne* is an especially Foucaultian novel, all the fictional works I analyze in this dissertation address each in its own way how embodied subjectivities are constructed by historical, as well as political, social, cultural, economic, or medical discourses. The novels at hand especially confront the subjugation of women on the basis of their biological sex; yet, race, ethnicity, disabilities, and age also appear as essentialized corporeal factors that set the characters apart from societal norms and expectations. The specific nature of the political and economic contexts in each of these texts also favors the construction of "docile bodies." The authoritarian discourses prevalent during the Argentine Dirty War and the Pinochet Regime in Chile not only constructed their own version of what a "normal" Argentine or Chilean body should be and how it should act, but they also sought to control the bodies of individuals deemed subversive or "abnormal" through physical coercion or destruction. Furthermore, as Foucault's theory of power shows, the oppressive power in these violent contexts did not solely come from specific individuals empowered by the regimes, that is, from the top down.

Discriminatory and repressive power permeated Chilean and Argentine societies in such a way that every body was shaped by them in one form or another, rendering social relationships, reconciliation, and healing especially difficult.

Nonetheless, Kozameh's and Eltit's main characters are engaged in remembering past events and how these affect their present subjectivities, as well as in questioning and deconstructing the official "truth" about them; that is, they are, in a sense, applying Foucault's concept of genealogy. Through these processes, they become implicitly aware of and denounce the various power structures that lead to their oppression. This awareness empowers them to resist and take personal and collective actions toward structural change, social justice, and equality.

1.1.3. Recent Theories of Embodiment

As I have mentioned earlier, Merleau-Ponty and Foucault are not the only recent philosophers to theorize embodied subjectivity and bring special attention to the materiality of the body. Existentialists such as Simone de Beauvoir, to whom I will later return, and to some extent Jean-Paul Sartre both echo Merleau-Ponty's view of the body as a non-thing that is lived and experienced. Postmodernists, too, have been influential in using the body as key to exploring the construction of different identities. In their quest to deconstruct and reject the "grand narratives" of modernist discourse, which privileged "the experience of the disembodied, masculine Western elite," various postmodernist scholars chose an embodying theory approach (Davis 4). Indeed, the "high-theoretical postmodernism of the body theories" is apparent in the writing of a number of thinkers such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Pierre Bourdieu, and of course Foucault (Davis 40). Yet, while "postmodernism breaks with and

challenges modernist conception of the body," the body in postmodern discourse often "loses its material basis and becomes a metaphor" (Thomas 15). This metaphorical use of the body is also prevalent in postmodern and psychoanalytic feminist thought, especially in the work of Julia Kristeva, who has extensively theorized the importance of the maternal body and bodily drives in the development of subjectivity, or in that of Luce Irigaray, who links specific female bodily phenomena and organs to language and the imaginary.

Kristeva's and Irigaray's scholarship, as well as most contemporary feminist thought, has been influenced by de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (first published in French in 1949). While her assessment of women's oppression in her now canonical book has generated many criticisms, "we can see that in a sense all feminist dialogue entails a dialogue with Simone de Beauvoir" (Simons 8). Her thought has been key to bringing female biological and physiological facts into the limelight. In her view, "the enslavement of the female to the species and the limitations of her various powers are extremely important facts; the body of woman is one of the essential elements in her situation in the world" (Beauvoir, *Second* 41). For de Beauvoir, bodily existence and point of view are experienced differently by men and women since female embodiment is objectified and diminished on the basis of her specific biological condition, while male embodiment is not. Yet, she advocates that feminists not make the woman's body the centerpiece of their feminism but rather look for liberation beyond their bodies and perceived connections to nature: "that body is not enough to define her as woman; (...). Biology is not enough to give an answer to the question that is before us: why is woman the Other?" (41).

De Beauvoir's argument is in part a reaction to the way Western philosophy has historically viewed women as inferior, associating them with bodies, emotionality, and

objectivity, while equating men with minds, rationality and subjectivity. As Elizabeth Grosz states: "Women are somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men" (*Volatile,* 14). It is worth noting that these associations between women and corporeality have also been attributed to colonized and lower-class bodies (Alcoff 103). For their part, postmodern feminists such as Kristeva and Irigaray, as well as those adhering to what is often referred to as French feminism in the United States,

> take de Beauvoir's understanding of otherness and turn it on its head. Woman is still the other, but rather than interpreting this condition as something to be transcended, postmodern feminists proclaim its advantages. The condition of otherness enables women to stand back and criticize the norms, values, and practices that the dominant culture (patriarchy) seeks to impose on everyone, including those who live on its periphery – in this case, women. Thus, otherness, for all of its association with oppression and inferiority, is much more than an oppressed, inferior condition. It is also a way of being, thinking, and speaking allowing for openness, plurality, diversity, and difference. (Putnam Tong 195) [23]

While this postmodern interpretation has also generated much criticism among different feminist scholars, it is part of a broader trend of feminist thought which, since the 1970s, has leaned toward Levin's argument that "we need not theoretically jettison our embodiment in order to rectify historical inequalities; we merely need to show the contingency of traditional concepts of women's bodies and adopt new, more liberatory ways of being embodied women" (72). As I will show in subsequent chapters, this is a position that Eltit and Kozameh adopt as they place traditionally marginalized Latin American female bodies and their experiences at the center of their fictional work. By focusing their writing on female corporeality and by presenting characters who vehemently denounce and resist violence through their bodies, both authors maintain that

[23] The term "French feminism" has often been questioned. For example, Christine Delphy views what is labeled "French feminism" in the United States as an "Anglo-American invention" (194). It "has in fact little to do with what is happening in France on the feminist scene, either from a theoretical or from an activist point of view" (191). Nonetheless, the labels of "French feminism" or "French feminist theory" remain in use in the United States, as they conveniently refer to a specific group of francophone scholars.

Argentine and Chilean women are not passively waiting on the sidelines of history, but are empowered agents who refuse to be constructed as disenfranchised and marginalized individuals. As embodied subjects, they have agency and can use their bodies as tools and vehicles of resistance.

While it would be impossible to mention here the many recent feminist scholars who have drawn attention to the subjugation of females bodies, Judith Butler's performative account of gendered theory in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and in her subsequent work has been extremely influential in shaping our understanding of how "normalizing practices becomes not only a way in which already male and female bodies seek to approximate an ideal, but the very process whereby gendered subjects come into existence at all" (Lennon n. pag.). Butler rejects the notion that gender differences have their origin in biological differences, and instead sees gender as a matter of bodily style and performances, which can change over time and in different contexts. She further argues that gendered performances not only "incorporate a presumptive heterosexuality; but they also reflect class, 'race' and cultural positioning as well as age" (Lennon n. pag.). In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler addresses the materiality of the body as "the product of particular modes of conceptualizing, modes which do not escape the workings of power" (Lennon n.pag.). While she agrees that the body exceeds discourse, she maintains, like Foucault, that we can only explore alternative ways of conceptualizing it by resorting to discursive practices.

Like Butler, Grosz argues that it is within the social and discursive realms that the material body acquires meaning in a way that is culturally understandable, yet, she conceives materiality in terms of "active forces." In her view, "the body is involved in a process of active 'becoming' which outruns any account which might be offered of it within culture." The body is thus not simply a materiality which escapes efforts to

interpret it in a conceptual way; "it is actively involved in processes of change and transformation" (in Lennon n. pag.).

While the aforementioned theorists and scholars have been influential in my understanding of embodiment in general, most focus primarily on the bodies and corporal experiences of white heterosexual individuals and offer very little insight as to how other types of subjectivities living and being represented in different contexts are embodied or are constructed by and experience power dynamics. Furthermore, with the exception to some extent of Marxist and socialist feminism, a majority of feminist thought emanating from the United States and Western Europe since the 1970s that addresses women's bodies has the tendency to focus primarily on sexuality, reproduction, or appearance (Sutton 9). While these factors are central to feminist research on embodiment, women have other important embodied experiences too, such as that of political activists, prisoners, patients, or workers as seen in the novels analyzed later in this dissertation. Furthermore, given the facts that the works of fiction that I analyze narrate the embodied experiences of traditionally marginalized Latin American women, that they were written by two female authors from semi-peripheral countries in South America, and that their plots take place in Chile and Argentina and refer to specific historical, political, and economic contexts, it is imperative that my understanding and approach to female corporeality and embodied experiences as represented in those texts take these factors into account.

In order to do so, I favor, like Sutton, the theoretical assumptions of "two broad streams of sometimes overlapping feminist scholarship" to understand the complex dynamics of female corporeality in Latin America: intersectional feminist frameworks and transnational feminist frameworks (Sutton 9). Developed by black scholars in the United States, including Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins, intersectional

feminism focuses on the dynamics of race, gender, and class in processes of inequality and exclusion. One basic principle of this approach is "that systems of inequality – which can include global disparities – mutually constitute and reinforce each other" (10). Prominent Latina scholars who have expanded on how this principle affects women in/from Latin America include Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. Transnational feminist frameworks emphasize how "hegemonic globalization processes build on and often perpetuate inequalities not only between nations but also within them" (10). This approach demonstrates that the lives of women around the globe are connected through a "complex web of power and interdependency" (10). The writings of Chela Sandoval and María Lugones address aspects of transnational feminism in relation to Latin American contexts. As Sutton eloquently explains in regards to the compatibility of these two theoretical frameworks: "Attending to hierarchies within as well as across nations clarifies our understanding of global processes and shows the multidirectional workings of power, including power dynamics that manifest more directly onto and through the body" (10).

Before turning my analysis to the literary representations of female bodies from Latin America, I would like to briefly address other factors that have influenced recent concerns with and theories of the body, and why I see the body as a useful analytical starting point. It is worth noting that many of the contemporary thinkers that I previously mentioned, as well as most present-day scholars who write about the body, are, in one form or another, influenced by historical, sociological, and political factors that require special attention to the contextual materiality of the body and to the emergence of theories of embodiment. First, the historical experiences of the twentieth century, in which the capacity for total destruction of human bodies became possible, included warfare, mass destruction, and genocide and provided countless occasions on which the

body was threatened, in pain, or extinguished (Brooks 262). As I have briefly mentioned before and as I will later explain in more detail, the Dirty War in Argentina and the Pinochet regime in Chile are two of these tragic instances.

Secondly, the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first were and still are marked by a series of global factors that call for a renewed interest in and deeper understanding of embodiment in general. These include the incursion of consumerism into almost every aspect of our bodily existence, the rapid technological developments in biomedicine, the advent and global spread of HIV and AIDS, the rising costs and disparate availability of health care, an increasingly aging population in most western societies, the health risks associated with environmental pollution, the fear of international terrorist attacks including suicide bombers, as well as the undesired outcomes of wars, state terrorism, violence, and poverty in developing nations (which include trauma, massive exile, disappearances, and immigration) (Thomas 16). Each of the fictional texts I analyze in this dissertation not only touches upon several of these topics, including health-care related issues, aging, and especially state terrorism and its effects on corporeality, but they do so in a way that highlights the potential for resistance and resilience of the physical body.

The characteristics of these contemporary sociological factors, as well as the various conceptual and theoretical outlooks that have emerged about the body in recent years, demonstrate that there is not a single theory of the body because there is not one body. As Margrit Shildrick explains:

> there are only multiple bodies, marked not simply by sex, but by an infinite array of differences – race, class, sexuality, age, mobility status are those commonly invoked – none of which is solely determinate. In such a model, the universal category of the body disappears not as the result of the disembodiment characteristic of masculinist discourse, but in favour of a fluid and open

> embodiment. At any given moment we are always marked corporeally in specific ways, but not as unchanging or unchangeable fixtures. (8)

Arthur Kroker, who further expands on this idea, argues that it is impossible to speak today of "the body as a cohesive singularity" because "the very meaning, both surfaces and structure, of the body has begun to drift" (2). In his view, we now inhabit a "multiplicity of bodies – imaginary, sexualized, disciplined, gendered, laboring, technologically augmented bodies" and the codes that govern behaviors across this multiplicity of bodies are themselves "in drift," that is, they are unstable, subject to random fluctuations, evolving:

> There definitely are codes of gender that can be transgressed only at the price of punishment, but there are always gender drifters who remix, recombine, and replace the codes of gender performance. There certainly is a disciplinary regime of sexuality, but there are also sex-code drifters who make their own sexual assignment and opportunity to transgress the codes, to refuse the normative, to overcome the predetermined. Against class inequities burned into disciplined, laboring bodies, there are class drifters who make of their own protesting, rebelling, insurgent bodies a marker of the struggle for freedom. (3)

As I will show, the bodies represented in the texts that I analyze in this dissertation could be considered political and social "drifters" as they denounce and resist the violent models imposed by the dictatorships and by patriarchal society in general. In a way, these bodies are also literary drifters since their representation goes beyond the limited types of corporeality and bodily experiences that have traditionally been represented in Latin American literature and that, as I will later explain, have mostly focused on female sexuality.

There are several advantages to using the body as the focal point of my analysis and to viewing it as unfixed, incohesive, and multiple. First, this view supports my argument that the embodied characters in the fictional works I analyze are representing a corporeality that, until recently, has rarely been expressed in literature, while

simultaneously reconstructing a body that has been traumatized by state violence and continues to be silenced and abused by what could be considered economic violence. While I use "a corporeality" and "a body" to articulate my thesis, it is clear that these encompass multiple kinds of bodily experiences and materialities. This multiplicity occurs not only through the various embodied characters that I analyze but within each of them as well. As the title of my work states, I specifically look at how trauma, memory, and resistance impact female bodies that have been constructed as passive and marginal. The manifestation of these different elements, which are connected to contextual aspects of materiality, will be experienced differently, yet simultaneously and sometimes in a contradictory fashion by each of the main characters.

Studying the ways in which Eltit and Kozameh draw attention to the body as the most critical level of power relations is also useful in understanding broader social, political, and economic issues. As Sutton points out, "the body bridges the personal and the political, macro processes and micro interactions, structure and agency" (10). For example, writing about women's bodily experiences of gendered violence in the context of the Dirty War or the Pinochet Regime, reveals not only the personal efforts that authors such as Kozameh and Eltit undertake to denounce a silenced version of what occurred to many women during those violent times, but also a complex web of gender ideologies about motherhood, sexuality, and family that predated and were reinforced during the dictatorships. Such writing also shows how class, gender, race, and age inequalities increased the vulnerability of some women to physical abuse during and after the dictatorships; how the unremitting power of the medical and political establishments dictate women's view and decisions about their bodies; and how, to this day, "laws and ideologies that treat women's bodies as inert containers are intimately connected to the wounds and risks inscribed in and on the flesh of women's bodies" (Sutton 10).

Similarly, the body combines local and global forces. While the body can be conceived as "the most local place," it does not mean that bodies are "isolated units" (Sutton 11). In her novels, for example, Eltit conceives female bodies that acknowledge the local and specific experiences of individual Chilean women during and in the aftermath of the Pinochet regime, while at the same time representing them as being absorbed, yet simultaneously marginalized, by the globalized neoliberal economy. In Kozameh's texts, scenes of torture and imprisonment depict localized experiences lived by a group of women in one detention center, yet they also represent the horrors that occurred to many in Argentina and throughout the Southern Cone in the second half of the twentieth century. In addition, Kozameh's representation of her main character's forced exile to the United States and the challenges she faces as a result of this traumatic physical displacement also depict how the body is subjected to both local and global forces.

Furthermore, and in line with Kruks's argument stated earlier about our abilities to "feel with" the pain of others given our shared embodied existence, the examination of bodily experiences also allows for a deeper understanding of social issues, "partly because it encourages a closer approximation to social suffering" (Sutton 11). By inscribing the material fleshly bodies into their fictional work, Eltit and Kozameh offer us the opportunity to better recognize and understand the pain experienced by their characters and ultimately by those who lived through similar situations in real life. As these authors use the body to remember past events and create alternative narratives of pain and resistance, they also provide a different approach to writing about trauma. In his analysis of *What the Body Remembers*[24] (2000) by Shauna Singh Baldwin, Edward

[24] This novel narrates the violence of Partition from the point of view of Sikh characters.

Mallot explains that when past events are truly unspeakable, "the 'talking cure' even in literature – needs to be complemented by other means of understanding, expressing and processing the traumatic event." In his view, since "body memory is at once the most basic and most consistently focused on the suffering of the human body as the ultimate marker of the unspeakable, perhaps the body should be considered anew for its potential in testimony" (176). While I will expand on the topic of writing about trauma and testimonial fiction in subsequent chapters, I believe, as does Mallot about Singh Baldwin's novel, that the body in Eltit's and Kozameh's fiction becomes a source of subversive discourse against its traditional use as a marker of oppression, and that "if marginalization renders the subaltern voiceless, here the body becomes a way in which that voice is heard, outside our expectations of what 'speech' is meant to mean" (176).

In this section, I have looked at various useful theories of embodiment and at different approaches to the material body, including Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological view, Foucault's genealogical explanation of power, and a variety of feminist theories that often include insightful adaptations of Merleau-Pontian or Foucaultian arguments. I have also mentioned the various reasons why I believe that the material body is a useful analytical entry point. Yet, so far, my approximation to the body has mostly been philosophical in nature, as well as based on broad, somewhat generalizing concepts of female bodies and embodiment. I will now narrow my scope of analysis to recent literary representations of female bodies in/from Latin America.

1.2. WRITING THE BODY IN/FROM LATIN AMERICA

Bruce Dean Willis states in his recent study *Corporeality in Early Twentieth-Century Latin American Literature: Body Articulations* (2013) that, "to write the body

means to express the rhythms of existence in a spatiotemporal format designed to call on the reader's knowledge of how to read: sight or touch moving across the page, the recollection of words, their utterances, and their meaning learned over a lifetime" (7). Indeed, in contrast with other artistic means to depict the body, such as photography, painting, sculpture, or even dance and acting, the representation of the body in words "challenges the temporality of literary and oral narrative," and the writer must guide his or her audience through the time needed in the act of reading or listening (7). This means that he or she must therefore "presuppose both a greater precision and a greater generality from the attention of the reader or listener: precision, to name or to describe; and generality, to assume the audience's knowledge of bodies" (8). In literature, the body must therefore be written part by part, a phenomenon that Willis calls "the bodily synecdoche trap, " and can adopt many textual forms, which can range from the brief mention of a character's body or corporeal processes to the meticulous and elaborate description that include both precision and generality. Whatever the case, the author's decision to write parts of a character's body and silence others, as well as the sequence in which he or she does so, might influence the reader's understanding of a particular text, a claim that is only possible to make "given the temporal nature of literature" (11).

Furthermore, as Peter Brooks argues in *Body Work* (1993), literature is especially interested in the body's potential as the locus for the inscription of meanings:

> The body is made a signifier, or the place on which messages are written. This is perhaps most of all true in narrative literature, where the body's story, through the trials of desire and over time, often is very much part of the story of a character. The result is what we might call a narrative aesthetics of embodiment, where meaning and truth are made carnal. (21)

Written bodies, body parts, and bodily experiences thus often encompass specific meanings and qualities, serve as allegories or metaphors, are engaged in a collective sense or are contrasted against others for symbolic effects (Willis 10).

Therefore, while there is not one universal body, writing specific bodies can be useful to point out and subvert normative discourses about one type of body that are prevalent in a given society, as well as to connect readers to the Other through a common understanding of embodied experiences. As I will show in subsequent chapters, both Eltit and Kozameh skillfully bring Chilean and Argentine female bodies into meaning through a variety of textual and aesthetic forms, and in ways that depict their marginalized specificity within a geopolitical context, while simultaneously allowing for the reader/Other to connect with them through the representation of somewhat universal corporeal and sensorial experiences. In so doing, Kozameh and Eltit focus on and articulate the discursive construction of the Argentine and Chilean female bodies, as well as specific women's embodied experiences, and thus offer a powerful feminist approach to the representation of literary bodies in general. Yet, as I will now show, this representation differs from what has commonly been described in literature and feminist circles as "writing the female body."

1.2.1. Writing the Female Body in/from Latin America

While the expression "writing the female body" has been used in a variety of contexts, literature and feminist scholars often associate it with the concept of "l'écriture féminine," whose most prominent exponent, Hélène Cixous, describes in her influential essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" first published in French in 1975. Referring to her own experience and comparing it to that of women in general, Cixous explains that she

felt ashamed to talk about her desires and her body, a shame that resulted from the absence of any writing that truly "inscribes feminity" (878). By relying on her view of literature as a philosophy and by believing that literature can transform human thought, Cixous asserts that it is by writing and speaking from and toward women that women will be liberated from phallocentric oppression. While she states that it is impossible to define and theorize a feminine practice of writing, she implies that her writing, which is circular, personal, poetic and fluid, exemplifies it. Cixous's goal is to mobilize the "woman" to "write her body in order to discover herself. She must explore her *jouissance*, her sexual pleasure, so as to bring down phallogocentric discourse and, ultimately, change the world" (Juncker 426).[25]

In addition to Cixous's notion of "écriture feminine," the utterance "writing the female body" has also been linked to other French feminist theorists and authors such as Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, who, in the seventies and early eighties, each in her own way, also asserted the potential of language and literature to explore the female body and rethink women's sexuality in order to be liberated from oppression.[26] In Kristeva's words:

> Why literature? (…) Flaubert said, "Madame Bovary, c'est moi." Today many women imagine, "Flaubert, c'est moi." This identification with the potency of the imaginary is not only an identification, an imaginary potency (a fetish, a belief in the maternal penis maintained at all costs), as a far too normative view of the social and symbolic relationship would have it. This identification also bears witness to women's desire to lift the weight of what is sacrificial in the social contract from their shoulders, to nourish our societies with a more flexible and free discourse, one able to name what has thus far never been an object of

[25] For Cixous, jouissance "can be defined as a virtually metaphysical fulfillment of desire that goes far beyond [mere] satisfaction... [It is a] fusion of the erotic, the mystical, and the political" (Gilbert xvii).
[26] Influential works by these authors on the relationship between language, literature, and the female body include Wittig's novels *Les guérillères* (1969) and *Le corps lesbien* (1973), as well as her essay "On ne naît pas femme" (1980); Irigaray's *Speculum. De l'autre femme* (1974), *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (1977), and *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre* (1977); Kristeva's *Séméiôtiké: recherches pour une sémanalyse* (1969), *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (1980) and "Le temps des femmes" (1980).

> circulation in the community: the enigmas of the body, the dreams, secret joys, shames, hatreds of the second sex. ("Women's Time" 31-32)

Yet, as various scholars of Latin American literature have noted, including Sara Castro-Klarén, Amy Kaminsky, and Debra Castillo, the concept of "writing the female body," which focuses on the importance of individual sexuality and pleasure, described by and associated with the aforementioned French feminist theorists and writers, is not adequate to study the literary practices of Latin American women and their representations of the female body. As Kaminsky eloquently explains:

> The emphasis on being embodied, and even 'writing the body', can be liberating for women as writers and readers, but what can happen to women's bodies in politically repressive regimes is hardly the jouissance Hélène Cixous has in mind. Furthermore, although the notion of language as the internalization of the law of the father that necessarily entraps women is analytically exciting, it is not entirely new to Latin American writers, who have long since known, analogously, that the languages of the colonial powers - Spanish or Portuguese - cannot be used uncritically and that writers are responsible for codifying the new languages that must be forged. (23-24)

Castro-Klarén also notes in her seminal essay, "La crítica literaria feminista y la escritora en América Latina," that in order to adequately inscribe the Latin American female experience, it is imperative that writers take into consideration the double marginalization of women in that region, that is, as women subjugated by a patriarchal system, and as postcolonial subjects affected by European conquest (43). In both cases, Latin American women writers must make do with the language of the Other, and with a literary tradition that historically has ignored them.

This is not to say that female corporeality and phallogocentrism are not important topics for women writers in Latin America, but rather that their opportunities and motivations to address these issues are somewhat different than those of female authors writing from Western "colonizer" nations with a long democratic tradition such as France. Indeed, Cixous's concept of feminine writing had its equivalent in Latin

American letters. Among the most radical proponents of an "escritura femenina" were Argentine authors Luisa Valenzuela and Marta Traba who, each in her own way, claimed that women used language differently than men. According to Naomi Lindstrom, Valenzuela "often centered her fiction on ways in which women were dominated by men more skilled in the use of coercive language. An alternative theme was women's ability to escape domination by a more aggressive use of language" (132).[27] Traba, for her part, postulated in her classic 1982 essay "Hipótesis sobre una escritura diferente" that there were distinctive "signs that a given text was the work of a woman" (Lindstrom 132). In her view, the female-authored text "operates from another discourse" based on female experience and as such offers "a framework that challenges the patriarchal canon" (Schlau 16). Like Cixous's, Traba's hypothesis, and to some extent Valenzuela's approach, were criticized for their universalizing view of woman, and their potential for "convertirse en una versión de un 'determinismo biológico'," (Castro-Klarén 31). Yet, unlike Cixous, the exploration of female "jouissance" and individual sexual liberation was not a primary motivation or concern in their conception of an "escritura femenina." For example, in her essay, Traba states that "women naturally write from and of, if not necessarily to, the margins," (25) and thus she underlines the potential of women-authored literature not just to be a voice for women to seek and express liberation (be it sexual, social, political), but also to be a vehicle for other marginalized groups to speak up and be heard:

> Si el texto femenino queda situado en un espacio próximo (…), a los marginados culturales, en otras palabras si opera, como realmente lo hace, desde la marginación, podría perfectamente intermediar como lo hacen todas las

[27] Valenzuela's feminine language, which she calls "lenguaje hembrico," is visible in her 1972 novel *El gato eficaz* (Hart 118). She also describes her project of articulating a feminine language in various essays including "Mis brujas favoritas" (1982) and "La mala palabra" (1985).

> contraculturas, entre el productor solitario y el receptor desconfiado, (…). (Traba 42)

In her 1992 book *Talking Back*, Castillo expands on Traba's assessment of the transcultural possibilities that women's literature offers; she states that women writers in Latin America are not only "privileged in their accessibility to the peripheries of culture," but that one of their jobs is "to force dominant culture to recognize these [marginalized] regions, to unleash their dormant power, to impinge upon official consciousness without inciting it to even harsher reprisals" (58). While I find Traba's and Castillo's conviction in the potential of women-authored literature compelling, the female body still is the point of departure that led to the claim that Latin American women literature and discourse might serve as useful mediating tools between the center and the margins, and to the connections that many contemporary writers and theorists, including Eltit and Nelly Richard, make between the feminine and the oppressed.[28]

Indeed, while "jouissance," as imagined by Cixous, might not be what motivates Latin American women to "write the female body," given that sexuality is closely connected to any discourse of the body, writing about female sexuality has been an instrumental factor in making female embodiment and bodies in general a prominent preoccupation in recent Latin American narrative. As the following brief summary of the representation of female bodies in recent literature from Latin America shows, while class and race issues have prevailed over gender in the region, writing the female body (as in exploring female sexuality) from a woman's perspective has brought to the

[28] In a 1991 interview with Juan Andrés Piña, Eltit states: "Si lo femenino es aquello oprimido por los poderes centrales, debemos pensar móvilmente, y de acuerdo a las cirunstancias podemos, por ejemplo, pensar lo étnico, las minorías sexuales e incluso a países completos, como lo femenino, siempre en relación a lo otro, lo dominante" (245). Richard for her part explains that "la crítica cultural feminista (…) quiere (…) invitar a los sujetos y las identidades disconformes, con lo que reparte el consenso de las identidades clasificadas, a construirse a partir de la separación entre lo asignado y lo reinventable, entre lo unánime y lo divergente, entre lo clasificado y lo inclasificable, etc." (*Crítica* 84).

forefront a variety of other corporeal experiences and power relations that specifically affect women and other marginalized bodies.

While most of the Latin American authors who broach the subject of female sexuality before the 1960s are male and do so in a non-erotic disembodied fashion through the vilified figure of the prostitute or adulteress, there are notable female exceptions who overtly portray women's sexuality, erotic experiences, and hence female corporeality. These include among others: the Uruguayan poet Delmira Agustini (1886-1914), Brazilian poet Gilka Machado (1893-1980), Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), Chilean author María Luisa Bombal (1910-1980), Brazilian novelist Rachel de Queiroz (1910-2003), and Uruguayan writer Armonía Somers (1914-1994). For example, in *La mujer desnuda* (1950), Somers' main protagonist, Rebeca Linke, is unable to obey the societal conventions of her time by repressing her sexuality. The author presents a body and mind in conflict with scenes of self-decapitation and rejoining of the head and the torso that call for radical social changes (Marting 35). In her 1939 novel *As três Marias*, de Queiroz writes about abortion and sex outside of marriage, while "female sexual fluidity is present in much of Machado's poetry and is emphasized in her playing with the five senses" (Ferreira-Pinto 46). The exploration of female sexuality by women authors in Latin America predates by two decades Cixous's "écriture féminine."

Beginning in the 1960s, however, the representation of sexual female characters as victims or lawbreakers by male authors started to change and "the association of the sexual woman with freedom became a powerful new metaphor to deal with the urgent social and political crises" of the next decades (Marting 12). The upheavals of the sixties, including the international counterculture revolution and the women's liberation movement, as well as political and social unrest in various regions of Latin America, inspired many writers to include female sexuality as an important social theme: "the

sexual woman became a vehicle for speaking about more general hopes for a future with greater political and social freedoms, as well as sexual freedoms" (Marting 11). According to D. L. Shaw, the appearance of sexual themes in the literature of that period is also due to "the falling fortunes of the old novel of protest in Latin America" (281). While female desire continued to be portrayed as dangerous, prominent male authors started to write sexual fiction about women as a way to address other social or identity concerns more frequently (Marting 39).[29] Marting, who views this phenomenon as a particularly Latin American literary trend that intensified in the 1970s, describes it as follows:

> The meaning of female sexuality is displaced from the gender/sex system, where it had indicated some truth or story about women, onto a different social grouping, perhaps the character's own race, class, or ethnicity (i.e., metonymically), or onto one entirely other to her (i.e. metaphorically). When the theme of female sexuality is deployed within a strategy of displacement, female sexuality is utilized to discuss women's lives as distinct from men's, but also, secondarily and on another level, in analogy to another element of identity. In this strategy female sexuality is employed to speak of one race or economic class in contrast to another; of sexual orientations or affective circumstance; of small differentials in ethnicity, region, and involvement with popular or traditional culture. (38)

While Marting seems to indicate that this displacement of the meaning of female sexuality onto other groups also occurs in female-authored fiction, I believe that female writers were finally able to write bodies in ways that portrayed their cultural, racial, and economic diversity and vulnerability, while simultaneously exposing their marginalized social situation in a male-dominated society. By doing so, they highlighted, as various

[29] Marting cites Miguel Angel Asturias's *Mulata de tal* (1963), Jorge Amado's *Dona Flor e seus dois maridos* (1966) and Severo Sarduy's *De donde son los cantantes* (1972) as examples of novels that "refer to racial or ethnic communities in the guise of the adventures of a sexual female protagonist," as well as Enrique Congrains Martín's *No una, sino muchas muertes* (1958) to show how a poor girl's struggles to avoid rape is used to address poverty and class conflict (39).

scholars have noted, the impossibility of separating gender from other issues of race and class in Latin America.

The sixties and seventies were indeed even more of a watershed for women writers who, thanks to cultural and societal changes, slowly started not only to gain more literary recognition and exposure for their art, but also to imagine and write embodied female characters outside of the traditional norms of either passive mothers or sexually active outcasts. Not surprisingly, one of the prominent factors that influenced them to do so was directly connected to sexuality and to women's new ability (or potential ability) to safely control their own bodies: the commercial introduction of the birth-control pill.[30]

According to Marting, "whether or not birth control and easily accessible abortion were being practiced widely in Latin America during this period, the knowledge of their existence affected the way writers imagined sexuality for women characters" (37). As a result, female corporeal experiences, bodies, and voices became more visible in the writings of women authors, as seen in novels such as *La brecha* (1961) by the Chilean novelist Mercedes Valdivieso, *A paixão segundo G. H*. (1964) by the Brazilian writer Clarise Lispector, and *La señora Ordóñez* (1967) by the Argentine author Marta Lynch, to name only a few. As María Teresa Medeiros-Lichem notes, "the language of the body as a means of engendering subjectivity can be seen in Lynch's desperate search for sensations and substitutes to social constraints, and also in Lispector's language saturated with gestation metaphors, images and rhythms that approximate *l'écriture feminine*" (109).

Yet, it is undeniable that the Mexican author Rosario Castellanos' prose and poetry, starting in the late fifties until her untimely death in 1974, not only make up some

[30] The pill was approved for contraceptive use in the United States in 1960.

of the most influential feminist discourse emanating from the Latin American literary scene during this period, but also mark the beginning of a broader discourse of gender that "interlocks with the sociogram of subordination in the representation of women of different social strata in conflict with force relations of patriarchy and race" (87). Her fiction, including the award-winning novels *Balún-Canán* (1957) and *Oficio de tiniebla* (1962), focuses on "the critique of racial and cultural oppression of indigenous peoples in Chiapas and the status of women in provincial and urban Mexico" (Ahern 145). Castellanos' literary approach to these topics thus exemplifies and prefigures in a way Traba's and Castillo's previously stated view of Latin American women's literature as a vehicle for other marginalized bodies to be heard and seen, while her writing is still being simultaneously and primarily motivated by gender issues.

In her poetry Castellanos especially writes the body, as she inscribes diverse female sexualities, corporealities, and taboo bodily experiences in order to denounce Mexican women's subjugation to patriarchy, as well as expose their own participation in such an oppressive system. For example, in "Pequeña Crónica," she uses the metaphor of menstrual blood to express an unidealized view of female sexuality; in "Kinsey Report," she parodies an existing scientific text to record six women, including a lesbian and a virgin, talking about their oppressed sexuality; finally, in "Se habla de Gabriel," she also looks at the relationship between the body, self, and other during pregnancy. As Maureen Ahern notes, not only were these poems published years before Cixous's call on women to write their bodies, but "Castellanos' view of how language has shut women out of power structures prefigures the ideas that Adrienne Rich and Luce Irigaray published later in the seventies and eighties" (145).

Castellanos and other Latin American female authors therefore started in the sixties and seventies to address the converging topics of female social identity, sexuality,

and corporeality more frequently in their fiction through the voices of diverse female characters that portrayed lived experiences and bodies that had rarely been seen or heard in previous Latin American literature. Although pertaining to different genres, novels such as *Muerte por agua* (1965) by Cuban-Mexican writer Julieta Campos, *El gato eficaz* (1966) by Argentine author Luisa Valenzuela, *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* (1969) by Mexican journalist Elena Poniatowska, and *Estaba la pájara pinta sentada en el verde limón* (1975) by Colombian novelist Albalucía Angel, each on its own terms, question women's subordinate status in a specific Latin American context and how subordination affects their corporeality from a woman's point of view. Overall this trend continued throughout the seventies and early eighties with many more novels about female sexuality that either became part of "a new protest literature against women's condition," responded to "the new sexual emancipation of women," or underlined "the relevance of sexuality to a woman's condition" (Marting 42).

While this brief summary has looked so far at Latin America as a fairly "compact" region, it is important to remember that the political, cultural, economic, and social situations were different in each country and that these differences influenced the creative process of its writers and artists. This is especially true for authors from the Southern Cone who, starting in the late sixties but especially in the seventies and eighties, endured severe censorship mandated by repressive military regimes. While I will discuss the specifics of the Argentine Dirty War (1976-1983) and the dictatorship (1973-1990) of Augusto Pinochet, as well as their devastating impact on the Argentine and Chilean social and cultural scenes in subsequent chapters, it is necessary to note here that many writers and artists from both countries were persecuted, forced into exile, and at times even murdered for artistically expressing what the military juntas viewed as liberal and thus subversive ideologies. As a result, the authors who stayed in Chile and Argentina during

the dictatorships' most repressive times chose to delay the publication of their bolder work.

Still, according to Marting, writing about sexuality during these dangerous years became an outlet for Argentine and Chilean writers "to criticize the state or the elites from a position of relative safety, since censors often missed the metaphorical and lateral social commentary in sexual fiction" (19). The late seventies and early eighties also mark a shift in the kind of sexuality and bodies represented in Argentine and Chilean fiction. While still motivated by a desire to address women's issues, female-authored fiction's approach to sexuality started to reflect and condemn the extreme violence, pain, and forced disappearance inflicted by the military regimes on real bodies. The subjugation of female bodies by a male-dominated society intensified and became more explicit. Male figures, including lovers, husbands, brothers, and fathers, often became personifications of the repressive regimes and their traditional values. Subjugated female characters tended to represent the downfall of the nation, and the loss of democracy and personal freedom. Novels such as *Ganarse la muerte* (1976) by Griselda Gambaro, *Como en la guerra* (1977) by Luisa Valenzuela, *Conversación al Sur* (1981) by Marta Traba, *La casa de los espíritus* (1982) by Isabel Allende, and *Lúmperica* (1983) by Diamela Eltit are some of the earliest texts published during the Argentine and Chilean military regimes that address, each in its own distinct way, the effect of government oppression and state-sponsored violence on female subjectivity and corporeality.[31]

By the late 1980s, female sexuality in many Latin American novels had become "a complex node of pleasure and pain" (Marting 44). For writers such as Eltit, who remained in Chile throughout the dictatorship, and for Kozameh, who experienced first

[31] Gambaro was forced into exile by the Argentine military junta after the publication of *Ganarse la muerte* in 1976. Valenzuela, Allende, and Traba each published their novels in exile. Eltit stayed in Chile throughout the Pinochet dictatorship.

hand the brutality of the Argentine regime, pain has taken over and spread to most aspects of their female characters' bodies. While female sexuality is still important in the novels that I analyze, it now exposes the vulnerability of the female body in the context and in the aftermath of the dictatorship from a woman's point of view. Indeed, if in the previous decade the materiality of the female body often appeared to address topics related to women's erotic experiences and sexual pleasure (whether in positive terms to express liberation or in negative terms to express frustration), female corporeality in the novels I analyze is almost devoid of eroticism and focuses primarily on the trauma caused by rape, torture, prolonged imprisonment, and fear.

As Mallot and others have noted, the term 'trauma' "speaks of the blurring boundaries between body and mind" (166). While its Greek origin implied a physical wound, it is mostly used today to refer to sufferings of the soul and spirit. Yet, in *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (2002), Laurie Vickroy explains that the physical body is often the prime focus in the literature of trauma: "trauma writers make the suffering body the small, focused universe of the tormented and a vehicle for rendering unimaginable experience tangible to readers" (32-33). Thus, these writers "seek to make bodies the real texts by which others' experiences can be understood" (Mallot 166).

As my subsequent analyses will show, in Kozameh's and Eltit's texts the terrible effects of torture and imprisonment are not inscribed as visible signs or scars on the body, but rather are encoded in the bodies of the female characters as painful corporeal sensations and physical evocations that the reader must decipher in part by understanding the socio-historical and geopolitical contexts of the novels, as well as by referring to the knowledge of his or her own physicality. Indeed, the sustained focus on the corporeality of the female characters points to traumatizing events without spelling them out on the page or on the body. This phenomenon is closely related to the difficulty of explaining

traumatic experiences and putting them into language. It is also linked to the complexity of mourning, which in the context of trauma provoked by state terrorism and political repression, "needs to be understood as mourning for one's body that has been shattered by torture, imprisonment, and the displacement of exile," as well as for the bodies of those who disappeared (Portela 42).

While the traumatic events are undoubtedly related to the state-sponsored violence in effect during the Pinochet regime and the Dirty War, they also allude to various discriminatory practices (including harassment, rape, forced internal or external exile, and murder) that have targeted marginal groups, especially women and indigenous populations, in both countries since colonial times. The female bodies in Eltit's novels, and to some extent in Kozameh's texts, therefore carry and transmit the memory of various traumatic historical events and can thus be seen as rewriting the past in a way that counters the traditional and official male-dominated version. According to Sandra Soo-Jin Lee, who writes about the bodily dimensions of traumatic memories: "in cases where memory of events and experiences are continually challenged, undermined and erased by other more authoritative forces, the body is often presented in testament of the 'truth'" (92). Thus, while Kozameh's and Eltit's texts examine ways in which the body can retain and reveal an individual's past, as well as the ways in which one's physical and psychological selves interact, they also offer alternate narratives of trauma, resistance, and survival that illuminate the lived stories of many. Furthermore, they not only remember and voice past traumatic experiences and ongoing patriarchal oppression, but also offer a reading that exposes the materiality and vulnerability of the female body while simultaneously giving it powerful agency. Female bodies from Argentina and Chile are thus written in a way that challenges the marginalized status traditionally awarded to

Latin American women's corporealities, both in terms of voicing lived experiences formerly silenced and in terms of discursive practices.

As I will now show, Eltit and Kozameh privilege the female body as the collective voice of those victimized and silenced by the military regimes to remember, testify to, and subvert adversity and pain. Both authors thus explore the body's potential for remembering individual and collective pasts, as well as revealing individual and collective memory. In doing so, they expose corporealities that have been and continue to be suppressed by hegemonic discourses, reconstruct bodies that have been traumatized by state and economic violence, and affirm their feminist commitment to "demarginalize" women and other groups.

Chapter Two

Alicia Kozameh's Fictionalized Testimony:

Writing the Body to Document Trauma, Resistance, and Survival

In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992), Dori Laub explains that Holocaust survivors "did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive" (78). As a former political prisoner and witness of extreme state repression during and in the lead-up to Argentina's Dirty War (1976-1983), author and survivor Alicia Kozameh (b. 1953) has expressed similar views about her motivations for writing *Pasos bajo el agua* (1987), a poignant testimonial novel about her traumatic prison experience and the challenges that she faced in its aftermath. Telling her story and that of her cellmates became a matter of survival for Kozameh who, as a writer, chose to fictionalize her experiences and describes the process as a "drenaje doloroso" (Pfeiffer 96).

While most testimonials given by victims of the Dirty War include detailed descriptions of physical abuse and torture, Kozameh's novel, as well as her short stories published in *Ofrenda de propia piel* (2004), do not dwell upon such horrifying practices. Yet, her preoccupation with the lived body permeates her texts and is one of the most compelling aspects of her narrative. Although many scholars have highlighted the fact that in prison, one's physical body is usually also one's sole valuable possession, hence its importance in prison literature, I believe that Kozameh's vivid depictions of the materiality of the female body and its transformations go beyond this explanation and complicate the meanings that have been assigned to the imprisoned body.

Indeed, as Brooks notes:

> Narratives in which a body becomes a central preoccupation can be especially revelatory of the effort to bring the body into the linguistic realm because they repeatedly tell the story of a body's entrance into meaning. That is, they dramatize ways in which the body becomes a key factor in a text: how, we might say, it embodies meaning. (8)

This is especially relevant when taking into account the fact that the female imprisoned bodies that Kozameh writes about were not only assigned a negative meaning, but were also deemed disposable by the repressive state whose aim was to violently impose its conservative agenda. Indeed, the military regime justified its tyranny, which included torture, arbitrary detention, and disappearances, by resorting to a rhetoric filled with metaphors of the body. As Lessie Jo Frazier explains, the dictatorship saw the nation as a vulnerable organism contaminated by subversive forces depicted as diseased bodies. The military's mission was thus to act as an antibody and purge that disease from the national body (390).[32]

In this chapter, I demonstrate that, while Argentina's past military government tried to erase "subversive" bodies from its national narrative, Kozameh places the materiality of the insubordinate body at the core of her texts to denounce past oppression, document physical acts of resistance, and testify to the challenges of surviving traumatic experiences. I argue that her portrayal of the lived body as the concurrent site of destruction and reconstruction enables her to reclaim meaning for herself and other victims of the regime. I also show that through her writing of the body, Kozameh constructs a sort of collective feminist consciousness that allows for the brutally silenced Argentine female voice and body to be heard and seen as an agent of her own

[32] This rhetoric of illness has been used by various military governments and politicians over the years in order to justify their repressive actions and ideologies. This tradition dates back to Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888), who, in his seminal work *Facundo* (1845), uses medical terminology and refers to General Rosas and Argentina's lack of progress as a cancer that must be eradicated.

subjectivity. Her focus on the corporeal therefore offers a powerful counter-discourse to that of the military and is part of an effort to seek healing and restore justice.

Before analyzing Kozameh's novel and short stories, it is important to understand the political and personal contexts in which they were written. I start with a historical overview of the events that led to Argentina's Dirty War, the military dictatorship and the official state-sponsored violence that started in 1976 and lasted until 1983. I briefly look at the country's ensuing transition to democracy and the ongoing efforts by different groups to both forget and remember the victims who disappeared and the horrors that occurred during the dictatorship. Then, given the fact that the texts I analyze are deeply based on Kozameh's real prison and exile experiences, I briefly summarize her personal and professional circumstances.

My subsequent analysis of the body in *Pasos bajo el agua* and *Ofrenda de propia piel* is twofold and draws from a variety of theoretical sources. First, I demonstrate that Kozameh's focus on the corporeal in her texts allows her to simultaneously denounce and resist the severe emotional and physical violence that she, and so many others, experienced and witnessed during the Dirty War. It is through these concurring processes that she testifies to the challenges of reconstructing oneself after trauma and of living again in a society with which one can no longer fully identify. My analysis focuses especially on the physical and emotional impact that violence, captivity, and exile have on the main characters and on the relationship between the body and memory. Michael Humphrey's examination of the relationship between pain, political power, and suffering in *The Politics of Atrocity and Reconciliation* (2002) is especially relevant to my work. I find his definition of violence in relation to the body especially useful: "Pain is the bodily feeling produced by violence, political power is the source of violence, and suffering is the legacy of violence remaining as a memory in individual bodies" (1).

Secondly, I see Kozameh's individual and collective representations of the female body as offering a possibility for survival and resistance, even under the most difficult of circumstances. I demonstrate that her texts are feminist, not only in their representation of the female body, but also in their ability to simultaneously denounce and reject the ways in which women's bodies become a site of state control. I argue that Kozameh's representation of the female body allows for the construction of a collective identity that becomes critical for the prisoners to survive and start healing from their traumatic experiences.

2.1. THE DIRTY WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH: ERASING THE SUBVERSIVE BODY

Political unrest and state repression characterized most of Argentina's twentieth-century history as the country experienced twenty-five successful military coups between 1930 and 1976.[33] Furthermore, five military juntas controlled the country between the overthrow of Juan Domingo Perón's Populist government in 1955 and his return to power in 1973.[34] Yet, the level of institutionalized violence climbed to unimaginable levels in the 1970s and gave rise to what is undeniably the country's saddest period since the Argentine civil wars of the nineteenth century.

First, the early years of the 1970s were marked by the armed struggle of leftist guerrilla groups, including the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) and the Peronist Montoneros, who opted for violence in the hope of achieving social changes, while right-

[33] According to Brysk "between 1930 and 1971, the average president served only two years and ten months of the mandated six-year term. Between 1930 and 1983, Argentina had twenty-four Presidents (sixteen of whom were military officers) and experienced twenty-six successful military coups" (26-27).

[34] Juan Domingo Perón was first elected President of Argentina in 1946 and re-elected in 1951. He and his second wife, Eva Duarte, who died in 1952, were popular among many Argentines. Between 1955 and 1973, Perón went into exile and eventually settled in Spain, where, in 1961, he married Isabel Martínez Cartas, also known as Isabelita.

wing organizations such as the infamous Alianza Anti-Comunista Argentina (AAA), which "functioned as an officially unauthorized extension of repressive forces of the State," resorted to tactics such as abductions and torture in order to eliminate the leftist revolutionaries (Graziano 22). Secondly, the political instability was further exacerbated when Perón decided, upon his reelection in 1973, to shift to ultra-conservative views and ostracized the Montoneros, who had supported him and contributed to this return from exile (23). Resorting to the rhetoric of illness that I previously mentioned, Perón referred to this leftist group as "germs" that were "contaminating" the nation (23). Yet, it is after Perón's death from natural causes in 1974 that the situation truly deteriorated. His widow and vice-president "Isabelita" succeeded him as head of state and, with the influence of her Minister of Social Welfare, José López Rega,[35] also known as "El Brujo," she implemented a state of siege and launched an official and ruthless paramilitary campaign against the above mentioned guerrilla groups. According to Frank Graziano: "five thousand troops were mobilized in Operation Independence to quash one hundred twenty guerrillas of the ERP, this disproportionate display of force providing an index to the repression forthcoming under the dictatorship to follow" (24). During this operation, a clandestine concentration camp was also created and the paramilitary started to routinely abduct and kill political activists that were deemed to be subversives (Portela, *Displaced* 12). It is during this period that Alicia Kozameh, then a member of the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT) and a university student, was arrested and imprisoned in Rosario on September 24, 1975.

[35] "Testimony before a U.S. congressional committee of inquiry in February 1976 revealed that José López Rega – the former minister of social welfare, an intimate of the Perón regime, and the legendarily eccentric astrologer and occultist guiding Isabel Perón – was a founding member of the Triple A and utilized the ministry's press attaché as a liaison with the group" (Graziano, 22).

By early 1976, the country was in shambles: the economy had collapsed, the military had been granted unlimited power, violence was all-pervasive, and Isabel Perón's government had lost all of its supporters. On March 24, 1976, a military junta composed of the commanders in chief of the three armed forces staged yet another coup d'état and removed "Isabelita" from office. General Jorge Rafael Videla was appointed president and the military immediately implemented its so-called "Proceso de Reorganización Nacional" which sought to reorganize and restore what the junta called the values of "Western and Christian civilization" (Graziano 26).[36]

The eight years that followed are known as the "Proceso" or "Guerra Sucia" (Dirty War), a period of extreme state repression and violence that brought about the death and disappearance of possibly as many as 30,000 Argentines through torture and execution and sent thousands into exile.[37] During that time, the military set to eliminate not just the leftist armed insurrection and guerrilla supporters, but any citizen that it considered to be against the values of the state or who showed sympathy for social change of any sort. As reported by the Argentine Commission for Human Rights, General Ibérico Manuel Saint-Jean stated that: "First, we are going to kill all of the subversives; then their collaborators; then their sympathizers; then the indifferent; and finally, the timid" (qtd. in Graziano 28). The junta's broad definition of subversives therefore

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[36] "As the Junta saw it, the world was divided into two antithetical camps, organized around the United States (West) and the Soviet Union (East). God's will required that the military preserve the 'natural order' manifest in the Western and Christian civilization to which Argentina is integral, but the East had organized a massive international conspiracy to subvert that civilization by restructuring society in accordance with the seditious and atheistic doctrine of communism" (Graziano 26-27).

[37] The exact number of people who disappeared remains unknown. In his 1984 prologue to *Nunca Más*, Ernesto Sábato states that the National Comission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP) discovered "close to 9000" people who disappeared, adding that the commission had "reason to believe that the true figure is much higher" (np). Human rights groups in Argentina, such as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the Servicio de Paz y Justicia, as well as recent academic literature about the Dirty War often cite a figure of 30,000 disappeared.

included people of all walks of life such as white- and blue-collar workers, students, professors, artists, nuns and priests; and victims of repression included men and women, the elderly, teenagers, even children and pregnant women (29).

Forced disappearances, which consisted of kidnapping, torture, and detention in clandestine concentration camps, and execution without restitution of the body to family members, became the most common military repressive practices during the Dirty War. As Edurne Portela explains, "the word *desaparecido* became part of the everyday vocabulary to describe a victim of the repression" (*Displaced* 13). Abductions were often carried out in broad daylight by commandos, sometimes in civilian clothes, who forcefully apprehended people in front of relatives or on the street without giving any information as to why or where the person was taken. These irrational and arbitrary kidnappings were "intended to humiliate, demoralize, and terrify a broad population beyond the particular persons detained for punishment" (Weiss 63).

Diana Taylor's *Disappearing Acts* (1997), in which she analyses spectacles of gender and nation-ness in the context of the Dirty War, is very useful to understand how the military's imposed state of fear and repressive actions were aimed at creating and enforcing its masculinist notion of a new "authentic national body' by turning the Argentine population into a "docile, controllable, feminine 'social' body" (151). Indeed, while the military imposed its values through various systems of dominance and surveillance, including media and academic censorship, it also mandated strict controls on the physical body and on sexuality. Civilians had to behave and look a certain way in order to be considered obedient citizens and people "learned to 'read' others' bodies, a new system of signs and codes, just as they exposed themselves to observation" (107). For many, avoiding persecution therefore meant performing an imposed model of gender and nation-ness (92).

The military masculinist views also shaped the nature of their attacks on the physical bodies of those they imprisoned and tortured. Countless testimonies by men and women describe "acts of fondling, rape, sexual battering, and humiliations as well as death blows and shots aimed at the reproductive organs." Male and female bodies were thus "turned into the penetrable, 'feminine' ones that coincided with military's ideal of a docile social and political body" (152). Many babies born in concentration camps and prisons were also taken from their mothers immediately after birth and given to military families or well-placed supporters of the regime to be raised as their own. Therefore, and as DianaTaylor proposes:

> the gendered violence taking place in the discourse of the symbolic Patria was being played out on the 'real' bodies of the victims in order to shape a new symbolic entity: the national being. The 'real' bodies were used as the battleground, the geographic terrain, on which were fought the military's fantasies of Argentina's identity and destiny. (151)

The military's control over the physical bodies of its victims persisted even in death as appalling methods were used so that bodies would never be recovered or identified "because the absence of victim's bodies implied the absence of crimes and, in judicial terms, the absence of evidence essential to prosecution" (Graziano 16). Many victims were ultimately thrown from airplanes alive over the Atlantic ocean or buried in mass graves. Family members and friends of the disappeared had to carry on without ever knowing what happened to their loved ones and, as Reati explains, disappearance "deprived the survivors of the rituals of death: the funeral, the burial, the control over the destiny of the body, and the acceptance of finality" (qtd. in Díaz 3).

Although the Proceso's darkest and most repressive years occurred between 1976 and 1979, General Videla and his junta remained in power until the democratic elections of October 1983. Following a defeat in the 1982 Malvinas War and given the poor state

of the economy, as well as "the increasing political pressure regarding the desaparecidos," the junta was discredited and compelled to announce a return to democracy (Graziano 48). Throughout his time in power, Videla denied the existence of concentration camps, as well any involvement in or responsibility for the fate of those who disappeared. In the last few months of the dictatorship, every effort was made to secure impunity for all crimes committed during the Proceso. The military-promulgated Final Document on the War Against Subversion and Terrorism, for example, was an attempt to justify the Dirty War, while the Law of National Pacification was a self-proclaimed amnesty for all those involved in the repression (Graziano 49). However, in December 1983, newly inaugurated president Raúl Alfonsín repealed the forementioned law, ordered the arrest and prosecution of the military junta, and created the CONADEP (Comisión Nacional sobre Desaparición de Personas or National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons)[38] to investigate the human rights violations that occurred during the Proceso. CONADEP's summarized report entitled *Nunca más,* which openly denounces the crimes perpetrated by the military during the Dirty War, was published in November 1984. The book soon became a bestseller and, despite some criticism for allegedly trivializing past atrocities, its popularity "contributed most significantly to a new Argentine consensus recognizing the scale and aberrant character of 'dirty war' violence" (Graziano 50).

This investigation also led to the trial of the generals who headed the military junta between 1976 and 1983 and to their subsequent condemnation to life imprisonment

[38] The CONADEP thirteen members appointed by Alfonsín elected renown Argentine novelist Ernesto Sábato (1911-2011) as its president.

in April 1985.[39] Yet, amidst countless accusations against lower-ranking members of the armed forces, Alfonsín, under pressure from the military and fearing new violence, proposed the Ley de Punto Final. This law, which established a sixty-day deadline to present denunciations and start new trials, was passed by the Argentine Congress on Christmas Eve 1986. A few months later and despite the protection offered by this new law, a military uprising known as los Carapintada demanded the end of all trials against any middle- or lower-ranking officers in the armed forces, police, and prison services. This unrest threatened Argentina's new democratic government and, although Alfonsín was able to immediately end the rebellion, he did so by granting "virtual amnesty to all of the crimes committed by the military during the dirty war" (Graziano 55). The Ley de Obediencia Debida, which formalized this policy and was based on the rationale that lower-ranking officers were merely following orders and were thus not legally authorized to question the legitimacy of these orders, was passed by Congress on June 4, 1987 (56).

The Argentine transition from dictatorship to market-state democracy was thus marked by a strong desire from the government and part of the population to forget what had happened during the Dirty War. According to Avelar, forgetting actually became a necessity that the free market, which was first established during the dictatorship, imposed "to erase the reminiscence of its barbaric origins but also because it is proper to the market to live in a perpetual present" (2). This was further confirmed when Carlos Menem, who succeeded Alfonsín as President in 1989, granted amnesty and freed the small number of generals who were imprisoned for life at the beginning of the democracy, including Videla. Yet, it is important to highlight the tremendous efforts and

[39] Videla was sentenced to "loss of military rank, to absolute and perpetual disqualification from holding public office, and to life imprisonment for charges including homicide, torture, robbery, and false arrest aggravated by threats and violence" (Graziano 53).

numerous actions undertaken since the beginning of the Dirty War by human rights groups such as Amnesty International, the Argentinean Commission of Human Rights, and especially the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo to denounce atrocities and human rights violations, to hold perpetrators accountable, and to find out what happened to the thousands who went missing, or more precisely "were disappeared."

Furthermore, and despite numerous threats and retaliations undertaken against them, human-rights activists, lawyers, and witnesses have achieved, in recent years, significant advances in the pursuit of justice for the victims: in 2003, Congress revoked the Ley de Punto Final and the Ley de Obediencia Debida; in 2005, the Supreme Court declared both laws unconstitutional, thus "making possible prosecution against all the military and police personnel suspected to have taken part in the torture and disappearance of thousands of people;" and in 2006, the term "genocide" was used for the first time in an Argentine court to describe the crimes of kidnapping, torture, and homicides committed by the accused Miguel Echecolatz, a former police officer (Portela, *Displaced* 22). Recent reports by the local and international press have also drawn attention to the ongoing work by non-governmental organizations, such as the Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense (EAAF), which uses genetic testing to identify remains found in mass graves. Up to date technology and tireless search efforts by survivors and relatives of those who disappeared have also recently led to the identification of individuals stolen at birth by the military during the Dirty War and, in some cases, to their reunification with biological families.

These ongoing efforts to restore justice for the victims of the repression have also allowed for a divided Argentina to start confronting and articulating its traumatic past, which are crucial steps for true national reconciliation and healing to take place. As

Annette Levine notes, March 24, 2004, the twenty-eighth anniversary of the military coup, "marked as significant change in the landscape of Argentine memory," as President Néstor Kirchner accompanied survivors into the Escuela Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA), a former concentration camp where about 5000 were tortured and killed, and officially designated the site as a Museum of Memory. This "alliance of President Kirchner with monuments for human rights is one of the first 'official' performances of reconciliation supported by the state" (147). At the individual level, forgetting the past has been impossible for many survivors and talking about it, although a liberating necessity for some, has also meant reliving it and confronting one's pain. Through her writing, Kozameh testifies to the challenges of remembering, addressing, and surviving the physical and emotional traumas that she and so many Argentines endured during the Dirty War. I believe that an analysis of the fictional work that relates to her experience during the Dirty War not only allows us to remember and reflect upon what has happened in Argentina in the past four decades, but it also gives us insight into the mechanisms of coping with and surviving adversity.

2.2 ALICA KOZAMEH: A VOICE OF RESISTANCE AND SURVIVAL

Alicia Kozameh was born in 1953 in Rosario, Argentina's third largest city, located on the Paraná River some two hundred miles northwest of Buenos Aires. Her mother, whose Jewish family was of Syrian origin, converted to Catholicism when marrying Kozameh's father, a banker, whose Greek Orthodox parents had immigrated from Lebanon. In an extensive interview with Gwendolyn Díaz, in which Kozameh speaks about her early life and political activism, the author refers to her family as being "dysfunctional" and mentions her parents' insistence on hiding her Jewish ancestry, as

well as her father's aggressiveness toward her (312). She also shares the ambivalent feelings she had for her older sister Liliana, who was mentally and physically handicapped and whose situation greatly affected their family life. She often had to care for her sister and had to endure the constant anger and disappointment her parents felt because of Liliana's disability. She explains that writing became a coping mechanism: "I learned to write and began writing when I was only four. I suppose I started that young because I needed a refuge away from the daily chaos of our life" (312). Her sister died when Kozameh was seventeen, and she left her parents' house shortly thereafter.

She first became involved politically in school during the late sixties by participating in demonstrations against the economic and social injustices of the government. This was also the time when she started reading philosophy and the teachings of Marx in particular. She learned about the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT) at sixteen and became an active member of the party by the time she was a student at the University of Rosario. Between 1973 and 1975, while studying philosophy and literature, she also participated in party meetings and demonstrations and was active in the workers' front. Given Isabel Perón's violent actions against leftist groups at the time, Kozameh's activism became such a dangerous endeavor that, after two years, members of her own party asked her to back away: "They feared that if I did not retreat, I would be captured or murdered" (Díaz 314).

Unfortunately, on September 24, 1975, she was arrested by nine men from the Federal Police and the AAA while alone in the apartment she shared with her boyfriend. They questioned her, beat her, told her that they had killed her partner and eventually transported her blindfolded to the Sótano, the basement of the police department where female prisoners were kept. Although she eventually learned that her boyfriend was still alive, she remained captive in the Sótano for over a year and had to share a small cell

with thirty other women. She was later transferred by plane to Villa Devoto, a prison in Buenos Aires, where she was held until December 24, 1978. Unlike many political prisoners who were held secretly, Kozameh was tried for being a PRT militant and the records of her arrest and trial eventually helped her as the government could not make her disappear: "There was paperwork on us, and our names were circulating all over the world on lists of human-rights organizations like Amnesty International and the Red Cross" (315). Kozameh further explains that, during the three years and three months that she spent in jail, she and her cellmates experienced continuous psychological torture: "We never knew if we would ever get out or what would become of us. We were fed extremely poorly and were not granted even the bare necessities. Also, we were sometimes beaten and slapped around" (318). Despite these harsh conditions and the fact that she was not allowed to have paper, Kozameh was able to write forty poems and smuggle them out while in the Sótano. At Villa Devoto, she was given two notebooks in which she wrote in tiny letters and drew some sketches, and she was allowed to keep those notebooks upon her liberation from jail.

When she was finally released in December 1978, Kozameh was placed on probation, which meant that she had to report daily to the police department. Furthermore, she was spied on and followed wherever she went for months. Eventually the police informed her that it was in her best interest to leave the country and despite some serious delays by the State Department in issuing her a passport, she was able to depart from Argentina in 1980 and established herself in Los Angeles.

It was in California that she began writing fiction and worked first on an unpublished novel. Then in 1983, she started writing *Pasos bajo el agua*, a novel based on her experiences in jail and in exile. Kozameh explains that this work "delineates the itinerary" of her exile as she started it in Los Angeles, worked on it for two years while

later living in Mexico, and finally published it in Buenos Aires in 1987 after returning to live in her homeland with her young daughter Sara. Despite Argentina's return to democracy, Kozameh found out that freedom of speech was still an illusion on the day she celebrated the presentation of her novel: "As I left the event and was walking home with my four-year-old daughter, I was approached by two men who stopped me and threatened to kill me and my daughter if I did not stop publishing garbage and leave the country" (Díaz 317). Fearing for her life and that of her child, she immediately returned to Los Angeles, where she has lived ever since.

To date, Kozameh has published five novels, numerous fragments of her novels, a book of poetry and several short stories, most of which have been compiled in her 2004 *Ofrenda de propia piel*. She has co-edited *Nosotras presas políticas: Obra colectiva de 112 prisioneras políticas entre 1974 y 1983* (2006), a compilation of testimonials, drawings, and texts written by female political prisoners of the Dirty War. She is also the editor of two collections of texts and interviews about women and immigrants titled *Caleidoscopio I: la mujer en la mira* (2005) and *Caleidoscopio II: Inmigrantes en la mira* (2006). Most of Kozameh's fiction, like *Pasos bajo el agua*, is drawn from the author's own life experience. *Patas de avestruz* for example, which was first partially translated and published in German in 1991,[40] is about the relationship between two sisters, one healthy and one handicapped, while *259 saltos, uno inmortal*, published in 2001, is a novel that reflects on the experience of exile. Besides German and English, part of her work has been translated into Hebrew and French.

[40] Kozameh first published a chapter of the novel in the Argentine magazine *Fin de siglo*, where Erna Pfeiffer, a professor a the University of Graz in Austria, read it and then offered to translate and publish it in German. The Austrian publishing house later decided to publish the entire novel in 1997 under the title *Straussenbeine*. Alción published the original Spanish version in 2003.

Kozameh is currently an Assistant Professor of English at Chapman University in California where she teaches creative writing, among other courses. Although she writes in Spanish and is known primarily as an Argentine writer, she has been living and writing in the United States for more than twenty years and is therefore also a Latina writer. As Lockhart points out, Kozameh's writing has focused in different ways on the experience of living in exile in the United States, which is a recurrent theme in Latino literature (24). Finally, she is a writer of Jewish descent and especially thematizes Jewishness in the short story "Alcira en Amarillos" first published in the literary journal *Confluencia* in 2003.

2.3 *Pasos bajo el agua* and *Ofrenda de propia piel*

As was previously explained, *Pasos bajo el agua* (1987) is heavily based on Kozameh's prison experience: it includes, in a non-chronological and fragmented fashion, the circumstances of her arrest, the abuse and degrading conditions she endured in jail, her friendships with other female prisoners, her release and, finally, her lasting struggles to heal from such a traumatic experience and to live in exile. In the book's short introduction, Kozameh insists on the truthful and collective aspects of her accounts: "Lo sustancial de cada uno es verdadero, sucedió, lo viví yo misma o lo vivieron otras compañeras y yo lo supe, aunque he reemplazado nombres o quizá detalles que para nada cambian, de hecho, la esencia de la cosa." Furthermore, she states that she wrote this book "para que los episodios de los que me ocupo sean conocidos" (7). It also includes reproductions of the cover of one of the two notebooks she was given while in detention at Villa Devoto and of the sketches she drew in them.

Yet, the author makes it clear that she has fictionalized many of the situations described in her text: "les he dado forma literaria porque me gusta, disfruto trabajar aprendiendo la literatura," and refers to her work as a novel in various interviews (7). The English translation, published in 1996, clearly emphasizes the text's fictional nature since the subtitle "A Novel" was added to its title, *Steps Under Water*. The story's main protagonist, Sara, is thus a fictional character who is only partially based on the real Kozameh and whose point of view is one among many as the narration goes back and forth between first and third persons. The novel's literary attributes are also evident in its circular structure and in its polyphonic nature. Indeed, the first and last chapters titled "A modo de regreso" and "A modo de regreso II" are connected, as they both recount Sara's liberation and return to her parents' home, while the rest of the novel is fragmented and gives voice to Sara and various female inmates through a collage of diaries, letters, notes, and drawings. Furthermore, the ten unnumbered chapters are separated by a one-sentence page that highlights physical movements and relate to the book's title: "Me detengo. Camino, me detengo" (17) or "Los zapatos caminan solos" (35).

Beside a new subtitle, the 1996 English translation is different from its original Spanish version, published in Argentina by Contrapunto, in two ways. First it does not contain any of the reproductions from Kozameh's original notebooks. Secondly, it includes two additional chapters that deal with Sara's life after her liberation and her difficulties adapting to her new reality.[41] These two chapters were ultimately included in the second Spanish edition published in Argentina in 2002. To this date, I have been unable to obtain a copy of this second Spanish edition and therefore will use the 1996

[41] In "Sara, Elsa, Marco, and the Dance of Great Sadness," we hear different versions of Sara's complicated romantic relationship with the husband of one of her former cellmates, while in "Sara, What Does a Jacket Mean to You?," which occurs in Mexico, we witness how Sara's memory about her painful experience can be triggered by mundane objects, in this case a jacket.

English version when quoting from those two additional chapters in my subsequent analysis.

Many of the protagonists present in *Pasos bajo el agua* reappear in the short stories compiled in *Ofrenda de propia piel* and each of these stories is related in some capacity to the traumatic prison experiences recounted in the novel. Published by Alción in Argentina in 2004, this book includes ten short stories. The first story "Acumulación," dated December 31, 2003, is a one-page introduction to the book in which Kozameh plays with the Spanish words "recuento" (recount) and "cuenta" (count/calculation) and their similarity to "cuento" (short story) to allude to her past: "Recuento es lo que, dos veces al día, con cada cambio de guardia, en las cárceles, llevan a cabo los celadores," and to explain her present: "Ahora lo que soy es una acumulación de cuentas un tanto susceptible, vulnerable. En dudoso estado de equilibrio" (10).

The book is then divided into two parts: "Consagraciones" with five short stories and "Cárceles complementarias" with four. All were written in Los Angeles between 1992 and 2004 and several of them were previously published in different literary journals, including *Hispámerica* and *Confluencia*, or in anthologies such as *Memorias colectivas y políticas de olvido* (1996) edited by Adriana Bergero and Fernando Reati. As José Luis Hisi notes, these short stories offer a variety of discursive styles: "la narrativa, en su forma ficcional y real, conlleva incrustada la poesía y el lenguaje teatral, dramatúrgico, con pizcas de otros lengajes referidos, como el del cine y la literatura oral" (np). As in the novel, different literary genres are present, including conversations, notes, and diary. Each story is also preceded by a dedication that often goes to victims of the Dirty War, such as the one in "Vientos de rotación perpendicular": "A los sobrevivientes, porque lograron sobrevivir. Y a los que no sobrevivieron, porque vivirán para siempre" (83).

The few critics who have analyzed Kozameh's short stories have focused mostly on "Bosquejo de Alturas" (1992). As Díaz points out in *Women and Power in Argentine Literature (2007*), which includes an English translation of "Bosquejo de Alturas," "Impression of Heights," this story could have been included in *Pasos bajo el agua,* since it recounts the experiences of thirty women prisoners, including Sara, who "are seen as a collective, a mass of body parts, fears and hunger" and are jailed in the basement of the Rosario police station (311). While this story is an important part of my analysis, I will also refer to the other stories and show that, as the book's title suggests, Kozameh imprints the materiality of the body in each of them and thus contributes to the effort of building a collective memory of the non-democratic period.

2.3.1. Facts or Fiction?

As I previously explained, *Pasos bajo el agua* and *Ofrenda de propia piel* are strongly and openly based on Kozameh's real traumatic experience and they both bring to light the violence, repression, and struggles that many Argentines went through just before, during, and after the Dirty War. It is thus possible to consider them part of testimonio literature.[42] This genre, which blends history and literature, is "notoriously fluid and difficult to categorize, because the word 'testimonio' can describe anything written by a first-person witness who wishes to tell her/his story of trauma" (Smith 26). In his seminal essay "The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio (Testimonial Narrative)," John Beverley attempts to define the genre as such:

[42] According to George Yúdice, "Testimonio includes a diverse corpus of literature prompted by periods of intense social and political upheaval throughout Latin America, including the Cuban Revolution (1959), the Bay of Pigs/ Invasión de Girón (1961), the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua (1979), Indigenous human rights struggles in Guatemala and the military dictatorships that dominated the Southern Cone in the late 1970s and early 1980s" (20).

> By testimonio I mean a novel or novella-length narrative in a book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience. […] The situation of narration in testimonio has to involve an urgency to communicate problems of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on, implicated in the act of narration itself. […] The situation of the narrator in the testimonio is one that must be representative of a social class or group. (24-27)

The succinct explanation at the beginning of *Pasos bajo el agua* in which Kozameh states her intentions suggests the testimonial characteristics of her work.[43] Despite the fact that *Ofrenda de propia piel* does not include an introductory explanation, scholars such as Gladys Illaregui or Hisi wrote reviews of the book on the assumption that these short stories are testimonials.[44] Indeed, and as I have explained earlier, these stories involve the same characters as in the novel and can either be considered part of what occurs in the novel or are closely related to the events narrated in the novel. Yet, both *Pasos bajo el agua* and *Ofrenda de propia piel* do not align exactly with Beverley's definition of what has widely been accepted to be a testimonio.

As a writer, Kozameh's intentions go beyond the political act of telling her story and that of her cellmates as she is also especially interested in creating a work of art that has aesthetic and literary value. By blending facts with fiction in a poetic fashion, Kozameh joins other female authors who have challenged the traditional view of Latin American testimonio. As I mentioned in the Introduction, her texts are often compared to those of her compatriots Alicia Partnoy and Nora Strejilevich who, like Kozameh, survived detention and torture, and wrote creatively about their experiences. In *The Little School,* published first in English in 1986, Partnoy recounts her terrible ordeal at the

[43] The death threats that Kozameh received after first publishing her work in Argentina also attest to the reality of her accounts.

[44] Illaregui explains for example that: "encontré demasiado aciertos literarios como para tratarlo únicamente desde el ángulo testimonial" (251).

infamous concentration camp named La Escuelita. Her account "combines conventional prison memoir with fictional short stories, while also giving the reader facts about the concentration camp that could convict her attackers, (…) and the names of other Disappeared people" (Smith 27). In *Una sola muerte numerosa* (1997), Strejilevich offers a highly metafictional, polyphonic and autobiographical testimony in which she "juxtaposes oral testimony rendered in formal or legalistic circumstances with the more subjective and poetic representation possible with literary recreation" (Breckenridge 14).

In her unpublished dissertation about Argentine women novelists writing against the state, including the aforementioned authors, Janis Breckenridge traces the "incorporation of increasingly experimental narrative techniques into the parameters of the testimonial genre" to show how this leads to an "aesthetic de-familiarization" of that genre (193). I agree with her assessment that both *The Little School* and *Pasos bajo el agua* "illustrate that the fusion of (factual) testimony with literary creativity results in a highly effective testimonial narrative" (67). For her part, Kathryn M. Smith explains in "Female Voice and Feminist Text: Testimonio as a Form of Resistance in Latin America" (2010) that Latin American women have successfully appropriated the inherently masculine testimonio genre in their efforts to fight two notorious axes of patriarchy: "military/governmental control and the chauvinism of male revolutionaries" (22). In her analysis of *The Little School,* she stresses the fact that it is the combination of fictional and nonfictional elements that makes Partnoy's text "more powerful and riveting than prison memoir or autobiography alone" (33). In *Reading the Body Politic*, Kaminsky also addresses the combination of facts and fiction in Partnoy's text and gives the following explanation that I find very useful to approach Kozameh's texts and testimonio literature in general:

> North American pragamatism overtly opposes reality to fiction and values the former, while the Continental theory that all reality is constructed contains an implicit oppositional dichotomy (constructed reality/inherent reality). This implied opposition is analogous to the mind/body split that values mind over body, spirit over matter, abstract over concrete. Taking testimonial writing seriously, which means paying attention to its call for action in society, means a return to the concrete, to the body, and to the referent, as terms of value and power equal and not opposed to the abstract, the mind, and the signifier. (54)

Finally, Elzbieta Sklodowska argues that "testimonio inevitably positions itself around the shifting borders of a well-known but elusive genre, the novel" and deplores the limitations of seeing testimony as a "seamless monument of authenticity" (67). These scholars are only a few of those who, in recent years, have broadened our understanding of the testimonio genre and who have embraced the factual and creative aspects of what we might call "testimonial fictions" or "fictionalized testimony."

It is paramount to note however that beyond Kozameh's preoccupation for writing texts of high literary quality, her decision to fictionalize her story is a survival imperative as it allows her not only to make sense of her traumatic past, but also and paradoxically to escape from it. As she states:

> Si yo, por ejemplo, no convierto el hecho mismo en una fantasia, no logro entenderlo más que en su aspecto racional. (…) Después de que el hecho succedió, lo instalo en mi mente como ficción; lo desnaturalizo en sí mismo y lo convierto en algo muy diferente (…) si sale como lo mismo que fue, quizás yo ya estaría muerta, porque no me aguantaría tanta mierda. Es una transformación. Yo no podría soportar los sucesos. Yo creo que en el momento en que suceden, uno es muy fuerte, uno se los aguanta. Por un simple mecanismo de defensa, de sobrevivencia. Pero después, tener que aguantarme toda la vida pensar esos hechos sin tener una alternativa (para mi artística), no los podría soportar. Porque ahora tengo la gran ventaja de pensar en los hechos como los hechos mismos, y de poder escaparme a *Pasos bajo el agua* cuando quiera, y a otros textos que escribí sobre los mismos temas. Que constituyen la alternativa ficcional. (Pfeiffer 95)

With this quotation, and as I set to analyze the representation of the physical body in *Pasos bajo el agua* and *Ofrenda de propia piel* in the following pages, I am reminded

of my ethical responsibility toward their author who survived horror and built through her narrative a space for resistance and solidarity.

2.4 Writing the Body to Denounce, Resist, and Exorcise Trauma

In their analysis of Kozameh's writing, various scholars, including Buchanan and Cox, have noted the prominent place that the Argentine author dedicates to the lived body and its sensory apparatus. David William Foster, for example observed that, in *Pasos bajo el agua*, Kozameh "is concerned to inventory the body as an organic phenomenon beyond the specific circumstances of interrogation" and that her novel "captures both the materiality of the body and its transformations" (53). It is precisely her vivid portrayal of the body and the ways she represents it to simultaneously express, resist, and overcome pain that I found most compelling in her novel and short stories. Therefore, and as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, my main objective is to show that Kozameh's focus on the corporeal in her texts allows her to simultaneously denounce and resist severe emotional and physical violence, and to testify to the challenges of reconstructing oneself after trauma. I also look at the act of writing the female body as an attempt to exorcise an embodied trauma generated by violence and discrimination in order to seek healing and liberation. As my analysis shows, each of these topics is closely related to the others and they often occur simultaneously.

One of the most startling aspects of Kozameh's writings lies in the way she represents the body in a dismantled fashion throughout her novels and short stories. She often focuses on specific body parts or organs that seem loosely connected to each other. This constant fragmented representation could be part of an overall creative effort by the author to reject traditional and realistic modes of writing. As I have touched upon earlier,

Kozameh's novel is fragmented on various levels: its structure is not linear; it is composed of various types of discourses such as diary entries, letters, and sketches; the point of view constantly shifts between first and third persons and between past and present tenses; and there are few linguistic connectors between the narrators' ideas. According to Beatriz Sarlo, who has observed this fragmented style of writing in various Argentine authors of the 1980s:

> The violent fragmentation of the objective world had repercussions in the symbolic world. Having to come to terms with repression, death, failure, and lost illusions, fiction introduced bewilderment by using two basic strategies. On the one hand, it rejected mimesis as a unique form of representation, and, on the other, it proposed a discursive fragmentation of both subjectivity and social reality. (240)

I believe that these strategies are indeed present in Kozameh's novel and short stories and that they are part of a constant effort by the author to represent her reality while resisting it at the same time. On one hand, fragmentation in her texts can be interpreted in part as a literary device that challenges traditional (masculine) prison or testimonial narratives to communicate the devastating and confusing effects that severe state repression has on reality and on discourse in general. On the other hand, given Kozameh's traumatic personal experience, fragmentation, especially when representing the body, is one of the strategies, in addition to fictionalizing the events, that the author uses to survive the emotional pain caused by writing that experience. It is also an attempt to realistically represent Sara's traumatized state and denounce how state-sponsored violence, captivity, and forced exile have shattered her physical and emotional being.

2.5 Expressing and Resisting Embodied Violence, Captivity, and Exile

Zillah Eisenstein explains that "the physicality of the body becomes a horribly powerful resource for those who wish to conquer, violate, humiliate and shame" and, as I have explained earlier, the torture and disposal of supposedly subversive bodies was a dreadful strategy that the military used to get to and remain in power during the Dirty War (33). While Kozameh writes about various of the drastic measures taken by the junta to persecute Sara and her cellmates, including the way Sara is kidnapped and beaten in *Pasos bajo el agua* and how a woman and a child are being tortured in "Vientos de rotación perpendicular," for example, violence does not occupy center stage in her novel or short stories, and she does not provide lengthy descriptions of torture sessions or the physical injuries that result from it. It is not my intention to suggest here that Kozameh or her fictional characters did not experience torture. Not only has the author openly spoken about how she and other political prisoners were tortured psychologically, but several of Sara's and her compañeras' experiences depicted in the narrative relate to torture as described by the United Nations.[45] However, unlike the oral testimonies compiled in *Nunca Más* that "cling tenaciously to the body – the wounds, blows, and shocks administered to the flesh" to provide evidence of and condemn torture, Kozameh's inventory of the body goes beyond proof of physical destruction and draws attention to the psychological effects of corporal violence (Diana Taylor 161). When referring to the oral testimonies compiled in *Nunca Más*, Diana Taylor explains that:

[45] The article 1.1 of the United Nation's Declaration Against Torture states: "Any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person, information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions" (np).

> the person describing the violence seems trapped in the body/mind split provoked by their torment in their effort to keep their personhood out of the picture. It is as if the survivors, separating themselves from the violence inflicted on them in and through the body, negated the totalizing and engulfing nature of pain by isolating it onto the body. (161)

In Kozameh's texts, however, this separation between mind and body does not usually occur. On the contrary, she seems to specifically write the body in order to express Sara's (and her own) emotional and psychological pain. Her character's emotions are also often expressed in highly visceral ways and seem to reverberate to specific parts of the body. This is the case for example in *Pasos bajo el agua*, when Sara addresses her confused state by describing how the words spoken by two of the policemen who arrested her bounce inside of her, as if her stomach and head were empty spaces: "Hablan de una prima que se va a Europa. Europa se me deshace. Me rebota en las paredes del estómago, de la cabeza. No entiendo" (23). It could also be argued that at times she writes emotions in order to articulate the body. In both cases, she affirms the overwhelming character of suffering and the fact that her subjection and recovery are both physical and emotional. Furthermore, her display of the traumatic impacts of violence encompasses those related to her characters' captivity and subsequent exile.

While she does not directly address the topic of torture by providing gruesome descriptions of wounded bodies, her fragmented representation of the body alludes to the dehumanizing and painful nature of torture that literally seeks to destroy the physical entity of the body and reduces one's existence to the corporeal. In "Bosquejo de Alturas" for example, Sara describes her cellmates resting on their beds as a pile of body parts: "Las cabezas, los brazos, los pies, tratan de olvidarse de las vísceras" (*Ofrenda* 24). By describing her compañeras in such a fragmented fashion, Sara demonstrates how the constant psychological torture by zealous prison guards, the stress of not knowing whether she will live or die, and the unsanitary conditions in which she is forced to live

have an impact on her perception of the people around her. Indeed, while in many instances she refers to her cellmates by name and speaks of their individual characters and physical attributes, there are times, such as in the above-quoted passage, when she or the third person narrator sees others as mere body parts. In this way, she internalizes the dehumanizing effects of torture and confinement.

Yet, while chopping the body into parts implies destroying it, paradoxically the way each part or organ appears to remain intact and tries to function independently or reconnect with others shows an attempt not only to resist destruction but also to actively reconstruct and preserve the integrity of the body. The following passage from "Bosquejo de Alturas," for instance, details part of the ongoing organic communication that occurs inside the prisoners' bodies and which keeps them alive and interacting with each other: "Hay fulgores. Son el frotamiento de las moléculas que conforman los músculos y las paredes del estómago. Salen los ombligos, por las bocas, se encuentran en el aire, producen luz. Llaman la atención de las cabezas, se levantan los párpados, se cruzan las miradas, se reconocen, se hablan" (*Ofrenda* 24). By virtue of this biological process, not only are the prisoners' bodies alive, but also their organs are working together, giving them the power to communicate with each other and to resist as one.

This collective resistance also appears in the way the narrative voice describes the prisoners almost as a single mass: "Por lo menos treinta cabezas. Y todas sin desórdenes genéticos. Seiscientos dedos. Trescientos de manos y trescientos de pies, " (13) and in the way these bodies speak as one at the end of the story: "El cuerpo de todas, somos" (32). Here the boundaries of each individual body expand to include the entire cell and therefore transform the prisoners into one. By representing a collective body made up of fragmented parts, the author highlights the paradoxical and profound sense of community that these women achieved in order to resist and survive such terrible conditions.

Kozameh's focus on the lived body and its internal functioning is also a testament to the controlling and transforming power that imprisonment has on one's perception of reality. In the opening chapter of *Pasos bajo el agua* entitled "A modo de regreso," Sara, who has just been released and finds herself back on the terrace of her parents' home, choses the corporeal to communicate how prison dramatically distorted her interpretation of certain sensations. She understandably feels overwhelmed by the noises of motorbikes and the rhythm of people's feet walking on the street that she has not heard and felt, and by the sunlight that she has not seen, in over three years. Yet, upon hearing a cat meow, Sara is suddenly filled with irrepressible fear and panic. Images of dead cats that she saw during childhood overcome her and she instantly remembers the feeling of being horrified and physically sick. She explains for example that after passing one of those dead animals on the street: "llegué a casa y tenía la garganta hinchada como si allí estuviera instalado el cuerpo muerto, gordo y amarillo. Entre la lengua y el esófago. Me metí en el baño, directo a vomitar" (14). The fear and memories that the cat meowing sets off in her are disconcerting and do not coincide with her father's memory of how much she liked these domesticated animals as a child.

Since the unexpected sound of the cat triggers Sara's involuntary memory, Kozameh asserts, like Proust, the centrality of the physical to the activity of recollection. As Kristeva points out, the Proustian unconscious form of memory is "grafted in the actual body of the narrator" (82). Yet, while Proust is famously able to recollect a feeling of happiness associated with eating a madeleine,[46] Sara retrieves a feeling of terror and death from what should have also triggered a pleasant memory. Her memories of the dead cats remits back to the circumstances in which those sights and feelings took place

[46] In *Du côté de chez Swann* by Marcel Proust, published in France in 1913.

and notably the fact that, in the first instance, she links a dead cat to the present violence occurring in Argentina: "Ibamos a Alberdi, a la casa de su hermano, que estaba muy vivo y no se imaginaba que iba a morir viente años después en la calle, como muchos gatos, pero de balas paramilitares" (13). Furthermore, amidst her remembrance of dead cats Sara also alludes to her own traumatic experience and questions her reality : "Qué diferencia habrá entre lo que siente un milico al ver un gato y lo que yo siento ahora con sus maullidos" (14). Sara's involuntary memory is therefore related to her traumatic experience in jail. In *Memory*, Anne Whitehead, who examines the contribution of recent trauma theory to the understanding of involuntary memories, explains that, according to neurobiologists van der Kolk and van der Art, "trauma is registered and encoded in the brain in a different way from ordinary memory" and that "the 'memory' of trauma is thus not subject to the usual narrative or verbal mechanisms of recall but is instead organized as bodily sensations, behavioural reenactments, nightmares, and flashbacks" (115). The above episode therefore highlights how Sara's memory of trauma is engraved not only in her brain, but in her entire body.

Her memory also combines past and present, as she associates the dead cats with the state-sponsored violence that claimed her uncle's life and ultimately her own freedom and perception of reality. Indeed, while hearing a cat forces her to recall horrific images and feelings, she is unable to remember cats in the pleasant ways she used to see them before her ordeal: "Tengo que averiguar algo sobre gatos; volver a enterarme, aprender" (14). This also shows how the memory of trauma cannot be conceptualized as a constructive process in the way memory of regular events serves to create a continuous identity. As neuroscientist Nikolai Axmacher demonstrates, traumatic events cannot become part of one's personal identity because "their subjective meaning is not re-evaluated and integrated into a narrative continuity with other events, but remains

restricted to the situation when these events were experienced. Repressed conflicts and traumatic events remain permanently present in a pathological sense – they cannot be forgotten or temporarily dismissed" (np). This explains in part why the narration moves from past to present and how Sara relives in the present tense events that occurred in the past.

In *Writing Prison*, Portela, who explores Kozameh's symbolic uses of language and images in relation to the representation of traumatic memories of violence, explains that the cats "represent for Sara two extremes; they are creatures that appear to be immortal by escaping almost any danger, and it is precisely for this reason that, when they die, they embody the absolute horror and omnipotence of death" (120). As Sara leaves the terrace to join her friends and family, she has the impression that the stairs are "cubiertos de gatos amontonados, enfermos, colgando, aferrados a las bandas, blandos o endurecidos como goma seca." They are, as she further explains, "una mueca reverencial que me hace la libertad" (*Pasos* 15). It is therefore through her unwanted physical reaction to the meowing cat on the terrace and the emotions that this brings out in her in this episode that Sara realizes the depth of her trauma and the contingency of her body to being subject to forces she cannot control. When considering the lasting impacts of violence on one's post-traumatic reality, Humphrey explains: "healing cannot mean the reconstitution of prior relationships since in most cases that world has been lost. Violence does transform individuals and social relationships. Victims cannot just pick up prior relationships, nor are they able to see the world in the same way" (120). Sara's awareness of this transformation within her, which starts with her physical reaction to the cat in the first chapter of *Pasos bajo el agua,* might point to the long road of recovery that awaits her, but it is also an important step toward the construction of her new self.

In contrast to most prison narratives, which start with the main character being

detained or in detention, or with oral testimonies that usually concentrate on the traumatic event and not its long-term aftermath, Kozameh starts her novel with Sara's "way back" to freedom and thus conveys her intention to focus on rebuilding oneself. While Sara's experience upon hearing a cat in this first chapter points to the traumatic and lasting impacts that captivity and violence have on her mind and body, it also allows the author to focus simultaneously on the constructive aspects of recovering one's senses and physical freedom, or as Sara explains: "(…) lo que es recuperarlo todo de golpe; ocupar las oquedades con sonidos que nunca han sido olvidados" (12). Sara's body forces her to understand that her experience has changed her and that she has the ability to build new maps and perceptions of her relationships to the world. Therefore, by describing the recovery of physical sensations and by portraying a dismembered body, it is as if Sara were literally piecing herself together.

This process is extremely difficult and Sara seems to equate being free with being in physical pain. In *Pasos bajo el agua,* she describes how everything and everybody outside of jail became "alien" and "hostile" to her and her former cellmates: "everything smelled as though it didn't belong to us" (80). Being free, she explains, filled them with "unremitting pain": "[But] we fell, stunned and hounded by nausea, in the middle of the resounding deafness of a people deadened by fists. And it gave us a good dose of sadness and anger, though I'm not sure how effective a dose it was" (81). Furthermore, freedom provokes emotions of guilt and confusion that affect Sara in highly visceral ways: "I have that windmill turning in the pit of my stomach. Everything that goes on around me makes the windmill move and it exasperates me, it churns my insides" (54). By chosing words that allude to physical violence such as "hounded by nausea," "deadened by fists," and "it churns my insides," Sara indicates that she experiences her newly gained freedom almost as an act of torture. In her analysis of the first and last chapter of *Pasos bajo el agua*,

Portela points to the fact that being released from jail is a traumatic episode for Sara and that "the moment of liberation becomes an event that cannot be processed until it is remembered and written" (*Writing* 127). While I agree with Portela, I believe that, as the above quotes show, the trauma of being released is not a short-lived episode, but rather becomes a painful state of being that Sara fights emotionally and physically to accept as her new reality.

She becomes aware of a sort of distancing from reality that she does not fully understand and that pains her: "I am in the middle of all that movement, but emotionally I just don't take part. It's like sitting there watching a movie. And not just any movie, but a really insipid one…" (54). Being free in Argentina's political and social context is therefore a condition that makes her physically sick and that her entire body resists. In a sense, Kozameh counters the regime's rhetoric of the body that I referred to earlier. In her interpretation, it is the regime that contaminates the nation with a deadly virus that is spreading rapidly and affecting the physical and psychological health of its citizen through brainwashing, torture, or killing. Since, as Humphrey claims, "political power is the source of violence," it is fair to say that for Sara, violence does not end with her release from prison. Indeed, the repressive regime that detained and abused her is still ruling the country. Furthermore, given Sara's emotional and physical responses to her new reality, the political power at the source of violence cannot be interpreted solely as governmental power but should also encompass the acceptance of the repressive regime by a significant part of Argentine's society.

In *Pasos bajo el agua*, Sara makes it clear that the freedom she was granted is a misnomer, as the state still exercises control over her entire being. In addition to her daily check-in at the command post of the II Army Corps, she is subjected to constant surveillance and harassment by the police. Interestingly, Sara's representation of the

milico's body appears as fragmented as hers or that of her cellmates: "[But] in Rosario, to survive after prison in a city with one million people, when just by walking the streets at the same time you fatally encounter the same faces, the same feet, and consequently the same pistols (and if you don't see them, it's because they lurk, always on the muscle, under a sweater or, of course a jacket) – now, that was difficult" (80). Given that Rosario is the second largest city in Argentina, the above quote points to the fact that everybody looks alike and that no one can be trusted. Diana Taylor, who details the type of clothing and grooming approved by the regime during the Dirty War, explains that the military often tried to look like average citizen and used disguises "to infiltrate the other's space" (107). For Sara and her cellmates, whose cell represented an extension of their plural oppressed female body, the presence of hidden oppressors among the society that they now have to navigate is especially stressful. While they spent countless hours as prisoners observing each other, the task of reading other people's bodies, especially that of men, once out of prison, becomes a difficult endeavor that often leads to feelings of confusion and paranoia.

Furthermore, by adding "pistols" to the list of body parts that describe her oppressors, Sara seems to paradoxically highlight how violence has become an inherent part of being an Argentine man, while at the same this hidden metallic "part" precludes them from being truly human. Since there were no men incarcerated with Sara and her compañeras, the confined space that they shared in jail was mostly a feminine one. The few men connected to these women's jail experience were policemen or members of the military who carried guns and abused women.[47] By fragmenting the masculine body and

[47] The prison guards that appear in the novel and short stories are female and, while they clearly mistreated the inmates, men were present in most cases of physical violence. It should also be noted that Sara and other cellmates often refer to the female guards as cows and rats and, therefore, also dehumanize them.

by assigning it an inorganic limb, Sara dehumanizes her oppressor and denounces the extreme state of terror and repression that she continues to experience after being released from jail.

Thus, as Sara finds herself a stranger in her own city and to some degree to herself, she clings to the "plural body" that allowed her to survive and resist while in detention. It is again in the friendships and presence of the women who shared her traumatic experience that she is able to cope with and resist the emotional and physical feelings of estrangement that she faces in her new reality. Kozameh especially addresses the powerful bonds that unite these women beyond their years in detention in the chapter "Sara, Elsa, Marco, and the Dance of Great Sadness" that she added to *Pasos bajo el agua* in 1996, as well as in the short story "El encuentro. Pájaros" that she wrote in 1994. In the aforementioned chapter, the reader hears different points of view about Sara's choice to end her short affair with Marco, the husband of her friend and former cellmate Elsa, in order to keep their friendship intact. In the part called "(ELSA AND MARCO'S VERSION, THAT SAME NIGHT)" Marco points to the indivisible connections that Sara, Elsa and Cristina have: "Together you have a sort of energy I don't understand very well. And I don't know where it comes from. And even though you all seem to be fighting, there's nobody that can split the three of you up" (64). This chapter also highlights Elsa's difficulty in connecting with the pain that Marco experienced and continues to feel due to her physical and emotional absence in their marriage. Yet, it is Sara's explanation in "Encuentro. Pájaros" of why the military would not approve of the former cellmates' reunion that she, Elsa, and Cristina are organizing, that better sums up the feeling of community and resistance that exists between them: "Pero no nos quieren juntas, porque juntas, ya sabés, nos sentimos reconstruidas, cómo te puedo decir, retejidas, y podemos desafiarlos" (49). The lasting friendships and the feeling of

belonging to a body greater than oneself are therefore not only positive successes that these women achieved against and in spite of the military's intentions to destroy them physically and mentally, but they are also strengths that allow them to resist and cope with their new hostile environment well beyond physical detention.

It is in part through the conversations and correspondences that Sara has with her former cellmates over the years that she communicates how exile affects her sense of identity and physical integrity. As Sara explains while living in Mexico: "Now I've got this identity crisis; I stop knowing who I am. I lose my own way" (88). Yet, her struggle has more to do with her past traumatic experiences in Argentina than with her new life abroad. In the chapters of *Pasos bajo el agua* and in the short stories in which the protagonists, mostly Sara, find themselves in exile, the narrators' main preoccupation is remembering or forgetting traumatic events that occurred in Argentina and not so much on adapting to a new culture or environment. As Kaminsky notes: "Whether forced or voluntary, exile is primary from, and not to, a place. It thus carries something of the place departed and of the historical circumstance of that place at the moment of departure, making the exiled person no longer present in the place departed, but not a part of the new place either" (30). Indeed, emotionally, Sara first seems to live her exile as an extension of the feelings of alienation and confusion that she experienced in Argentina upon being released from jail. Physically, she experiences it through her body as a consequence of the military repression. Therefore, while her forced exile prevents her from being killed or suffering further retaliation from the military, she also interprets it as strategy that enables the regime to control, or worse yet, erase her physical being from the national narrative. Furthermore, she finds herself physically separated from the women who shared her trauma and with whom she identifies.

Remembering the past and making sense of it while in exile becomes, in part, a way of resisting a repressive regime that still affects her corporeality. In the short story "Dos días en la relación de mi cuñada Inés con este mundo perentorio," which is in part dedicated "a los protagonistas del exilio," Sara takes her sister-in-law on a car ride through Los Angeles and urges her to fight the sadness she feels about her husband's disappearance and the horror that she went through. Throughout the story and especially in the passage quoted below, we get a sense of Sara's need to keep believing in herself and in her friends, in the fact that the military regime did not crush them emotionally and physically, that they resisted and still are resisting:

> ¿Qué somos, Inés, sino las marcas del miedo, del miedo del adversario a nuestra resistencia accidentada y potente? ¿Qué nos rige sino estos pies que nos transportaron el cuerpo casi embalsamado a través de corredores carcelarios y calles conminatorias, alarmantes, los mismos que se ejercitan ahora, día a día, en carteles luminosos de otras ciudades del mismo mundo, los que nos impulsan por lo que nos queda de la vida, los que nos absuelven del temor a lo que falta? (66)

Sara's need to affirm her resistance and to cling to the bond that she shared with her cellmates becomes part of reconstructing her post-traumatic identity as a survivor. As Humphrey explains, being a survivor refers to "a 'group' identity amongst those who share the unshareable." He further adds that, "Survivor identity is constructed as much by an in-group recognition of who really shares a particular traumatic/horrific experience as much as through the experience of becoming the sacrificial victim" (121). It is especially difficult for Sara to assume this identity. Not only is the military regime still there and controlling her upon her release, but it also forces her into exile away from others who went through the same experience. Furthermore and as explained earlier, the Ley de Obediencia Debida, signed by democratically elected President Alfonsín in 1987, gave amnesty to all military personnel, including torturers and high-ranking officers who ordered the atrocities to happen in the first place. As Humphrey notes, "The survivors of

torture and political imprisonment were not recognised, with the consequence that they had to 'pay the real price of reconciliation'." The suffering of the living victims, such as Sara, is therefore denied and becomes politically and socially problematic (121). Agger and Jensen also explain that survivors were "stigmatised by their criminal records" and therefore "kept unemployed – and in poverty" (qtd. in Humphrey 121). Kozameh's novel, which was published in 1987, one year after the Ley de Punto Final and the same year as the Ley de Obediencia Debida came into effect, therefore also defies and denounces the indifference to justice of the new democratic government.

While the novel and short stories highlight Sara's struggle to reconstruct herself after leaving Argentina, ultimately, exile proves to be a productive space for Kozameh, to resist oppression, share, and start healing from her experience. As Humphrey explains, one way to get rid of the effects of violence is to share it: "however, sharing involves more than the rhetoric that 'revealing is healing' implies. Sharing involves not the elimination of suffering so much as its recognition as an enduring reality" (122). Writing for Kozameh is therefore a way to express her pain and to make sense of it, but it does not eradicate it. It is through her focus on the lived body that she alleviates her suffering and denounces how state-sponsored violence, captivity, and forced exile have shattered and continue to undermine Sara's life. And, as I continue to demonstrate in the next section, it is also through her central preoccupation with its materiality that she is able to reconstruct herself, as well as give a voice and agency to the brutally silenced female victims of the repressive regime.

2.6 WRITING THE FEMALE BODY TO SEEK HEALING AND LIBERATION

In his survey of Argentine-Jewish women writers, Foster notes that Kozameh's novel is particularly feminist in terms of its representation of the body (53). I agree with his interpretation, and believe that, through her writing of the female body, she constructs a sort of collective feminist consciousness that challenges the hegemonic repressive and patriarchal discourse of the state. In this section, I thus show how, by focusing on the prisoner's corporeality, Kozameh is able to simultaneously denounce and reject some of the ways in which women's bodies become a site of state control.

When Sara first arrives in the basement of the Rosario police station, she is temporarily jailed with common criminals who are accused of practicing or undergoing abortions, child trafficking, prostitution, or murder. Despite these serious accusations, their prospects of ever getting out of jail are brighter than those of the political prisoners. Adriana, a doctor accused of running an abortion clinic, clearly states their differences: "Sonaste. Ustedes sí que sonaron. Nosotras ponemos unos pesos, qué se yo. Capaz que si les ofrecemos un par de pibes a los empleados de la cana o del Juzgado, a esos estériles de mierda, en un mes estamos funcionando otra vez" (31). I would like to highlight here that while Kozameh does not elaborate further on the gender-related topics of abortion[48] and prostitution for which these women are jailed, the fact that she mentions them brings to light practices that have often been hidden in Argentine literature and society. It also allows her to denounce not only specific ways in which the state controls the female

[48] According to Human Rights Watch: "When the current penal code entered into force in the late 1880s, abortion was included as a crime with no exceptions. In 1922, while abortion was still illegal in all circumstances, the penal code provisions on abortion were amended to allow for three exceptions: punishment was lifted where the pregnant woman's life or health was in danger, where the pregnancy was the result of the rape, or where the pregnant woman was mentally disabled. During the 1976-1983 dictatorship, the penal code was changed to include further restrictions on abortion, requiring "grave" danger to a woman's life or health, and, in the case of rape, the commencement of criminal proceedings" (http://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/06/14/decisions-denied-0).

body, but also the extent of the state's corruption and hypocrisy in regard to these practices.

Eventually, the women who share Sara's cells, in Rosario and Buenos Aires, are political prisoners who are detained for their alleged participation in or connections with leftist groups that were supposedly plotting against the military regime. Although Kozameh does not address specifically her character's political affiliation or ideology, various indications in her texts points to the fact that Sara and her cellmates are in fact political activists. It is thus fair to say that a sense of community preexisted among the political prisoners who, in one form or another, disapprove of the repressive regime, are devoted to their cause and share a leftist ideology, often based on Marxism, that at its core promotes community over individuality.

This feeling of being ideologically connected to a whole larger than oneself, however, is magnified once in jail and transforms itself to encompass a powerful physiological connection. First, these prisoners share the experience of being female political activists in a conservative society that, despite such predominant political female figures as Evita and Isabelita, believes a woman's place is in the home, outside of public life. Tierney-Tello notes that this strict division between public and private was not only "at the heart of much authoritarian discourse," but is was also "a convenient fiction propagated by the authorities in order to better maintain absolute power over both spheres at once" (*Allegories* 23). Furthermore, as Ximena Bunster-Burroto explains in "Surviving Beyond Fear: Women and Torture in Latin America," the regime's disdain for women acting outside of the private sphere was cruelly dramatized in the way it tortured women: "one of the essential ideas behind the sexual slavery of a woman in torture is to teach her that she must retreat to the house and fulfill the traditional role of wife and mother" (307). She further observes that, from the junta's point of view, "Politically committed

women who have dared to take control of their own lives by struggling against an oppressive regime *demand* sexual torture" (307). It became well known that the junta's actions against any kind of dissidence included methods of torture that specifically targeted women. Female political activists therefore also shared a tremendous sense of loyalty to their cause and their country. Secondly, and as previously explained, being confined together for years in a small space and having to endure emotional and physical violence help unify the political prisoners into one collective body and narrative voice. It is through the corporeal materiality of this collectivity that various acts of resistance are recorded.

The women resort to their corporeality in various ways in order to defy the negative effects of confinement and repression. By doing so, they also claim a new self-defined female identity that rejects the "subversive" label that has been imposed upon them. In "Bosquejo de Alturas," one of the powerful ways in which they use their common body as a resistance tool is by creating a living library. Tapping into their memory and imagination in order to recreate, for their cellmates, texts that they once read when they were free, they use the scarce cigarette rolling papers available to them and re-write these stories "con letra milimétrica." [49] These papers are then carefully hidden inside of their vaginas:

> Y Liliana, especializada, ya, después de tantos, arma el vaginal. Impermeable, envuelto en capas de polietileno de alguna bolsa entrada en épocas en que todavía se les permitía depositarles alguna comida. Sellado con brasa de cigarillo. Y adentro. Con o sin menstruación. Hasta ahora han logrado evitar que en las requisas les metan los dedos. Todo lo que se ha estado guardando vía vagina, se ha venido salvando. Y la biblioteca es indispensable. Contiene sus pensamientos. Su caudal intelectual. Su aprendizaje. La enseñanza de una a otras. El

[49] Griselda, for example, attempts to reconstruct episodes and metaphors from *Grande Sertao: Veredas* (1956) by João Guimarães Rosa and twenty rolling papers are dedicated to Engels' *Anti-Düring* (1878).

> intercambio. La justificación de resistir. La biblioteca confirma la existencia de todas. De cada una. (16)

By hiding these manuscripts in their most intimate part, sharing ideas and learning from each others, these women are empowering their own bodies to become a sanctuary for culture. As the above quote suggests, culture is defined both in terms of the enlightment that one acquires through education intellectual activities and exposure to the arts, and in terms of the beliefs and social behavior that one shares with a particular group of people. These bodies are thus subverting the meaning of worthlessness and disposability that the state has imposed upon them as they hold within "the only possible form of liberation for human beings," which is Kozameh's own definition of what culture means (qtd in Buchanan 49). In a sense their female bodies, which are innately built for the task and responsibility of reproducing life, reproduce in jail a different type of vital element needed for their own survival and that of humanity: words. Furthermore, for Kozameh, who has always considered writing as a refuge, and for Sara, who in the concluding chapter of the novel states "yo creo en la palabra. Con fervor" (101), it is as if the body and the word join to become one safe place.

By allowing words to penetrate them, as opposed to penises, these women also expand and subvert the definition of the traditional functions of the vagina. Indeed, they reclaim a part of their anatomy that has too often been violated by men, especially during these dark years of repression. As the testimonies compiled in *Nunca más* demonstrate, the atrocities inflicted upon the private parts of the women who were detained, tortured, and disappeared during the Dirty War were especially heinous.[50] Although Kozameh does not expand on the subject, she includes the following disturbing

[50] Men too were victims of vicious sexual crimes. For women however these crimes implied disastrous gender specific results since rape often produced unwanted pregnancies and mutilation of sexual organs caused permanent infertility and other lasting physical symptoms, such as incontinence.

scene that the narrator in "Vientos de rotación perpendicular" briefly remembers witnessing upon arriving in the basement of the police station : "La mujer se parecía tanto a la dueña del mercadito italiano. Dos hombres sosteniéndole las piernas abiertas y metiéndole en la vagina algo como una rata. Viva. Ella mirando, lívida" (87). The vagina has also historically been associated with pain and shame in Western culture. In their essay on the "Socio-Cultural Representations of the Vagina," Braun and Wilkinson explain that the vagina has "commonly and persistently" been represented in negative terms as "absent, passive, vulnerable, dirty, smelly, shameful, and even dangerous" (25). However, as the hiding place for the library and by becoming one with words, the vagina becomes a positive space that empowers these women to resist oppression and, in a way, to carry within them their own liberation. These prisoners' bodies also became a viable space to defy the constant surveillance and the authority of the correctional institution.

Although the above example is specific to the prisoner's vagina, I argue that Kozameh reclaims, in her novel and short stories, the agency of a real and marginalized Argentine female body, one that is rarely seen in Latin American literature. As I mentioned in Chapter One, there is not one universal (female) body, yet, as Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak asserts "thinking of the systematicity of the body, there are value codings of the body" (149). The bodies that Kozameh refers to are mostly those of the young working-class Argentine female political activists detained by the government. Nevertheless, her representations encompass physiological experiences and address value codings that occur to most female bodies. As explained earlier, patriarchal society, especially when ruled by authoritative regimes, has imposed conservative values concerning the appearance and function of all female bodies. The Argentine military junta, for example, promoted its Christian values, especially that of the nuclear family, through marianismo, which glorifies the Virgin Mary as the ideal of womanhood,

motherhood and purity, and revered an essentialist figure of woman as reproducer and nurturer. This imaginary model excludes therefore the representation of any physiological process of the lived female body. In her texts, however, Kozameh does not shy away from writing the deglamorized body as she includes a variety of body parts and organs, as well as body fluids that have long been associated with the abject, such as menstrual blood, perspiration, and urine.

Writing the unidealized female body as opposed to the sanitized image of a female body that does not bleed, urinate, or perspire is necessary in order to convey and denounce the horrific reality that these women experienced. Writing the lived body thus allows her to show how the often hidden or forgotten natural physical processes can take center stage when the body is the only thing that one has left. Furthermore, being confined to a small space with thirty other bodies that go through similar physical phenomena also normalizes these experiences. However, given the fact that the military regime viewed "subversives" as the ultimate abjection and sought to physically erase them through torture and disappearances, writing physiological processes that focus on the functioning of the body is also a way to make that body "reappear," to prove its existence and paradoxically to rehumanize these women. This is especially the case in the concluding paragraph of "Bosquejos de Alturas," in which the cellmates' collective body becomes the narrative voice and asserts its presence and defiance:

> El cuerpo de todas somos. El gran cuerpo completo. Todo el cuerpo. Su sangre, somos, y los huesos. La piel y la respiración. Y la vagina del mundo, somos. La gran vagina. Somos la orina producida por toda la especie humana. La orina de la vida. Y somos el origen de la orina: el alimento. (…) Somos esa gran máquina de soldar. Esa gran chispa. Y somos la armadura. El ristre cómodo. La lanza. La ropa que nos cubre. Siempre puesta. (*Ofrenda* 32-33)

In this short story, Kozameh presents what Zulema Moret calls "una geografía del cuerpo femenino" (82). Through the mapping of this geography, which includes the

representation of traditionally hidden and abjected physical features of the female corporeality, Kozameh rejects the ideal representation that the state constructed through its manipulation of so-called Christian values. Her mapping of the female body is one that also rejects the patriarchal gaze at woman as a sexual object. For instance, Kozameh does not engage with the representation of possible pleasurable intimate or sexual activities occurring between the prisoners, but focuses on the powerful and lasting friendships that these women foster and that arise from their detention. Through her representation of the female corporeality, Kozameh therefore gives these women a voice and a body that allow them to articulate the imposed violence and their identity in their own terms.

Performing also becomes an important way for them to resist and endure the reality of their life while in prison. First, by disguising themselves as different characters and by reenacting popular movie scenes, the inmates choose to temporarily assume other identities in order to mentally escape from their reality. In "Bosquejo de Alturas," the prisoner acting as the powerful Cleopatra is so immersed in her role that she even defies the armed male guards ordering her to hand in the sheet she used as a dress: "Si la quieren sáquenla ustedes" (20). Secondly, the women perform certain roles that might not reflect who they were prior to being detained. For instance, in the chapter "Como en la Guerra. En la guerra" from *Pasos bajo el agua*, we learn, through a conversation between Liliana and Gloria, that the cellmates are taking turns staying up at night in order to feed the babies and to prevent the guards from taking them away from their mothers. Through their dialogue, not only do we get a sense of how much the prisoners worry about and care for the babies, but we also learn about the difficulties of being a mother in jail and the unsanitary conditions in which these infants are kept. For instance, one of them deplores the fact that she will soon be separated from her son, since he is about to be

three month-old, the age limit for babies to stay in jail with their mothers. When asked who will care for the infant, she replies: "mi vieja: sesenta y ocho años, enferma, sola" (58). Later, we share Liliana's disgust when she realizes that a dead rat had drowned in the mate that she just gave to the babies (65).

Some women might not be mothers and others are mothers but do not have their children with them, yet, in jail, they all act as mothers to these babies. In a way, the prisoners redefine motherhood as a concept that goes beyond biology, without necessarily essentializing it. Furthermore, by portraying the prisoners as one body in "Bosquejos de Alturas" and by highlighting the lasting bond that unites these women in all of her texts, Kozameh also shows that their conception of what constitutes a family goes beyond the conjugal and consanguine unit promoted by the regime. As the prisoners become of the same flesh and blood, their mutual caring for each other's lives also seem to equate or even surpass what is often considered one of the principal functions of the nuclear family, that is, provision for its members. Furthermore, while detention forces them, at first, to define their "collective family structure" as one that excludes a father figure, Sara's failed relationships with Marco and Hugo and the secondary role that men play in her life, show that she embraces the prisoners as her family even after being released.

By writing the corporeality of the female political prisoners, Kozameh restores these women's bodies into a national and historical narrative that tirelessly tries to erase them. In her texts, the prisoners develop collective strategies of resistance through which they reclaim their own female bodies and redefine the values of nurturing, motherhood, and family that the repressive regime precisely accuse them of disregarding. Kozameh illustrates how gender discrimination and violence in prison mirrors practices and values imposed on free Argentine women as well. She therefore rejects the patriarchal view of women as mere objects and allows for the silenced Argentine female

voice and body to become an agent of her own subjectivity. Kozameh also constructs, through her representation of the cellmates' bodies, a sort of collective feminist consciousness that challenges the hegemonic repressive and patriarchal discourse of the state and becomes a critical aspect of these women's quest for survival, healing, and liberation.

Chapter Three

Pain, Survival, and Gender

in *Jamás el fuego nunca* by Diamela Eltit[51]

Just as with Kozameh's narrative focus, the intensity with which Diamela Eltit's draws attention to the vulnerability of the lived body, especially the female body, in order to tell a story that goes beyond the individual, is extremely forceful. In her 2007 novel *Jamás el fuego nunca*, Eltit (1949) focuses especially on the aging body and, as in César Vallejo's poem "Los nueve monstruos," from which she cites in the title and epigraph, disintegration and the proximity of death are two important themes of her narrative.[52] It is, however, in her exploration of suffering and in the way physical pain permeates her text that she is most faithful to Vallejo's poem.

Elizabeth Scarry explains in her now canonical book *The Body in Pain* (1985) that physical pain is difficult to communicate because it is "object-less;" it is a state that "resists language" since it cannot be linked to a particular referent, "it is unsuitable for the kind of objectivization on which language depends" (17). Consequently, physical pain is rarely represented in literature. Yet, she adds that when pain does find a voice, "it begins to tell a story" (3). In *Jamás el fuego nunca*, Eltit not only effectively conveys physical pain both thematically and stylistically, but it is also through the suffering of her characters that she unleashes the embodied memories of Chile's recent (hi)story. The

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[51] Part of this chapter was previously published as "Unleashing Embodied Memories: Pain, Survival and Aging in *Jamás el fuego nunca* by Diamela Eltit." *Ambitos Feministas*, 2 (2012): 77-93.

[52] This poem from renowned Peruvian poet César Vallejo (1892-1938) was published in 1939 in the collection *Poemas humanos*.

priority that she confers upon pain and her emphasis on the corporeality of her characters offers a novel perspective on human suffering, as well as on the cognitive process of healing from physical and emotional traumas.

As many philosophers have noted, including de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) and Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), the human body is the basis and recipient of most experiences like pain, pleasure, and fear. Merleau-Ponty explains, for example, that "my body is not only an experience among many. It is the yardstick of everything, the reference point of all the world's 'dimensions'" (53). Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, who also addresses this concept in his essay titled "Colonialidad del poder y clasificación social" further remarks that:

> En la explotación, es el cuerpo que es usado y consumido en el trabajo y, en la mayor parte del mundo, en la pobreza, en el hambre, en la malnutrición, en la enfermedad. Es el cuerpo implicado en el castigo, en la represión, en las torturas y en las masacres durante las luchas contra los explotadores. Pinochet es un nombre de lo que le occure a los explotados en su 'cuerpo' cuando son derrotados en esas luchas. En las relaciones de género, se trata del cuerpo. (124)

The body is thus the most critical factor of all power relations and it is its role in relation to pain that makes it so vulnerable. Since pain resides in the body, it is pain that makes the body a particularly important concern for the individual. Furthermore, as with physical pleasure, it is often because of pain that one becomes aware of his or her body.

In Eltit's novel, oppression is recorded both somatically and metaphorically in the bodies of her characters. In this chapter, I argue that it is through their physical suffering and deterioration, that the aging bodies in *Jamás el fuego nunca* are, on the one hand, narrating the silenced version of a painful past in which they physically experienced the end of a socialist utopia and the horror of a brutal dictatorship, while on the other hand representing a pessimistic present in which for many pain is still a reality and survival a way of life.

I look at three different bodies represented in the novel and concentrate especially on the way gender affects their interpretation and experience of pain. The following concepts were especially important in my interpretation of Eltit's focus on the corporeality of her characters and the way physical pain dictates their lives. First, as Arne Johan Vetlesen explains, the concrete experience of pain is a complex phenomenon that is always composed of a physical and a psychological component. Grief, "sorrow, experiences of loss, major defeats or powerful fears are all examples of pain with a mental origin" that can "find expression in diffuse stomach pains, headache, nausea, dizziness, stiffness, etc." (33). Psychological pain can therefore be produced by "bodily-physical factors," just as physical pain can be caused by mental issues (53). Secondly, Scarry and others have observed that "physical pain is able to obliterate psychological pain" because once intense physical pain occurs, everything else is removed from consciousness (34). The experience of severe physical pain creates therefore a distance from everything except the pain itself. One's reality, including perception of time and space and relations with others and the self, are dramatically changed and pain therefore transforms us (Vetlesen 55). Furthermore, while we might be able to choose, interpret or set aside certain feelings, "the feeling of pain is not a product of thought." It has an "autonomy, an independence and sovereignty vis-à-vis the person who senses it" (Vetlesen 51). Significance and meaning are thus not just determined by mental reality but by physical reality as well (Scarry 34).

First, I look at the way Eltit's unnamed male character is consumed by his physical pain and at his inability to face and accept the failure of his Marxist project. I draw a parallel between the physical deterioration of his body and the last three decades of the twentieth century, which were marked by the demise of Allende's socialism in Chile and the fall of communism around the world.

Secondly, I analyze the female narrator's past physical pain and present emotional suffering and show how they are both directly connected to her gender. I demonstrate how she tries to make sense of violent past physical experiences and how, through her search for meaning, she becomes aware of her subordination as a female vis-à-vis her partner and other males, but also as a Marxist militant in Latin America vis-à-vis a Eurocentric ideology. I also briefly look at the way she copes with her pain in order to survive.

Finally, I examine the descriptions of the aged bodies of the four elderly patients that the narrator cares for to show how Eltit tackles, in a powerful way, a subject that has long been overlooked in contemporary literature. Indeed, while the body has emerged as a primary focus of literary and cultural analysis over the past few decades, the topic of aging and its repercussions on the lived body have remained fairly unexplored and almost taboo. Her abject representation of four dying bodies offers a unique perspective on the marginalization of the elderly in Chile's present democratic free-market society and its desire to forget the country's violent authoritarian past.

Before continuing with my analysis of *Jamás el fuego nunca* (2007), it is worthwhile to briefly highlight some of Eltit's biographical information, as well a some politico-historical facts about Chile in order to contextualize the topics analyzed in this chapter.

3.1 A VOICE AGAINST THE OFFICIAL DISCOURSE OF THE STATE

Thirty years after the publication of her first novel *Lumpérica* in 1983, Diamela Eltit is considered one of Chile's most significant and talented contemporary writers.[53] In

[53] Famous literary critic Julio Ortega writes in his blog *El Boomeran(g)* that "Eltit es la escritora más importante de la lengua, y la más crítica del español complaciente" (01/02/2011).

August 2010, she received the respected Premio Iberoamericano José Donoso[54] as an honor for a lifetime achievement in American literature. Furthermore, her recent novel, *Impuesto a la carne* (2010), was a finalist for the 2011 Premio Internacional de Novela Rómulo Gallegos, Latin America's most prestigious literary award.[55] Most of her novels have been translated into English, French, and other languages.

Born in 1949, Eltit earned a B.A. at the Universidad Católica de Chile in 1970 and was a master's student in literature at the Universidad de Chile during the 1973 coup that brought down democratically elected socialist president Salvador Allende Gossens. His violent death on September 11, 1973 had a profound effect on Eltit, whose writing has consistently pointed to this event as a "historic rupture and the defining moment of Chile's democracy" (Lynd 13). In *Signos vitales*, Eltit has described life under the subsequent authoritarian regime of General Augusto Pinochet that lasted until March 11, 1990 as a painful and complex experience that she shared with millions of Chilean and that she vehemently opposed in different artistic ways (298).

Between 1973 and 1979, the most repressive time of Pinochet's rule, thousands of Chilean citizens who opposed or were merely suspected of opposing the regime were tortured and disappeared by the military. Artists and intellectuals became primary targets and, in the early years of the dictatorship, many were killed or forced into exile. As a result, the Chilean artistic scene remained paralyzed until the advent of a new cultural movement called the "escena de avanzada" that emerged in the late seventies. Franco-Chilean cultural critique Nelly Richard, who like Eltit, participated in this movement, explains that "the practices of the avanzada sought to subvert univocal, militaristic discourse through linguistic plurivalency and ambiguity" (qtd. in Green 10). In 1979 and

[54] Conferred by the Universidad de Talca, this literary award includes $30,000, a medal, and a diploma.
[55] Ultimately, the award went to Argentine author Ricardo Piglia for his novel *Blanco Nocturno* (2010).

as part of this movement, Eltit co-founded with other young activists, the Colectivo de Acciones de Arte (CADA), a group of artists who used performance to challenge the Pinochet dictatorship.

In 1983, under severe state censorship, Eltit published *Lumpérica*, a text that defies Pinochet's regime through narrative experimentation and the fragmentation of scenes of a woman's performances in a public plaza, of bodies and people who live in the plaza, of descriptions of torture, and of assertions about writing. As Juliet Lynd explains, "the novel explores at once the inscription of bodies into the new body of law ushered in by the Pinochet regime and the possibilities for resistance *vis-à-vis* the literary text" (17). Eltit published two more novels during the dictatorship: *Por la patria* (1986) and *El cuarto mundo* (1988). As I mentioned in the Introduction, in each of these texts, as well as in the novels she has written to date post-dictatorship, Eltit exposes the violence and repression of the authoritarian regime through innovative, fragmented, and poetic representations of the subjection and marginalization of various groups based on gender, race, and class. Another key aspect of her narrative lies in the way she openly challenges the discourses and politics of the free market that were implemented by Pinochet soon after he took power and that remained a priority for the democratic governments that followed.[56]

In 1988, the Chileans voted in a national plebiscite against extending Pinochet's rule and he voluntarily stepped down in 1990. Following the election of Patricio Aylwin Azócar and the return to democracy, Eltit participated in and supported the politics of the

[56] "The Pinochet regime, under the guidance of University of Chicago-trained economists, implemented a radical experiment in neoliberal economic policy. The 'structural adjustment' to the economy involved dramatic reduction of public spending, privatization of government enterprises, new labor laws that weakened worker's rights, and the deregulation of the economy to attract foreign investment. The result has been touted by some as an economic miracle (…); others have condemned neoliberal policy for deepening the divide between the wealthy and the poor" (Lynd, 28).

new Transition government by serving as cultural attaché to Mexico from 1990 to 1993. This marked the end of her "inxilio"[57] and the first time that she lived outside of Chile.

Like many of her compatriots, Eltit welcomed Chile's return to democracy but soon became suspicious of the ability and willingness of the Transition government and its neoliberal economic policies to resolve existing social issues that affect the marginalized and underrepresented. While she expresses her distrust in neoliberal economic programs in each of her post-dictatorship novels, especially *Mano de obra* (2002) and *Impuesto a la carne* (2010), Eltit does not endorse, in her writing, any economic or political agenda and "one finds a bitter critique of the false sense of coherency provided by any ideology, from the right or the left" (Lynd 14). In real life, though, Eltit openly supported her husband, Jorge Arrate MacNiven, in his campaign as the socialist candidate in the 2009 Chilean presidential election.[58]

It is also important to highlight that Eltit's writing is free of a paternalistic tone toward her marginalized characters. For example, her assessment of the Transition occurs "through a narrative positioning of marginalized subjectivities, as both presence and absence: presence by way of the text's reminders of the exclusionary forces of neoliberal economic policy, absence because the text refuses to speak for an other" (14).

From 1990 to the time of this study, Eltit has published eight more novels, as well as other projects including a photo-book in collaboration with photographer Paz Errázuriz, a volume of short stories, a selection of articles and interviews that she gave over the years, and a personal anthology. While primarily known as a novelist and artist, Eltit is also a university professor who has been teaching literature and creative writing

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[57] In *Signos vitales*, Eltit states: " yo pertenezco al llamado 'inxilio' chileno, es decir, permanecí en el país durante los 17 años de dictadura" (297).

[58] With only 6,21% of the electoral vote, Arrate was defeated by the Coalition for Change candidate Sebastián Piñera.

for over thirty years in Chile and more recently in the United States.[59] As an academic figure, she is very much in touch with literary and cultural theories and has published various articles about literature.

3.2 *JAMÁS EL FUEGO NUNCA*

Published in 2007, *Jamás el fuego nunca* narrates, in a fragmented fashion, the present and past life experiences of an unnamed aging heterosexual couple who, despite Chile's return to democracy, chooses to purse its "clandestine' life as former leftist militants by remaining mostly cloistered in their small apartment. Although we do not know their exact age, we can infer that they are in their late fifties or early sixties. Their daily routine is punctuated by meager meals, rambling conversations about their past and his health, and her compulsive need to check their expenses. While she regularly leaves the apartment to attend to her occupation as a caregiver to dying old people and thus earn a living, he does not work and spends most of his time in bed. Narrated from the perspective of and by the woman in the first-person singular, the story is an interior monologue addressed at times to her partner in which she mostly recounts their physical and mental suffering. She is obsessed with his aging body and with remembering some aspects of their past, most notably their participation in a Marxist militant cell and the death of her two-year-old son. Four of the nineteen chapters also consist of detailed, mostly lineal, accounts of the way she bathes four elderly patients.

One of the most striking aspects of this novel is the way in which the diegesis and metadiegesis are embedded and almost in dialogue with each other through the constant

[59] She is currently a full professor at the Universidad Tecnonlógica Metropolitana in Santiago and the Distinguished Global Professor of Creative Writing in Spanish at New York University.

suppression of textual markers. Indeed, through partial analepsis, the narrative voice goes back and forth between the present (the apartment, their aging bodies) and the past (the political actions of their youth, the death of her son) at times within the same paragraph. The ellipsis thus becomes an important aspect of the novel, not only in its syntax but also narratively, as important information is suppressed or left out. This fragmentation creates confusion for the reader, who has to infer what happened and is not always able to verify his assumptions. As we shall later see, the missing information mostly relates to past traumas and the use of the ellipsis highlights the impossibility of representing the unspeakable.

Another significant characteristic of the story resides in the way the reader is forced to question whether the narrator and her partner are dead or alive. Eltit herself explained that she was inspired by Juan Rulfo's novel *Pedro Páramo* (1955) when writing *Jamás el fuego nunca*: "estos muertos que hablan para siempre, *Pedro Páramo,* esa imagen me acompañó mucho" (112). In Eltit's text, the uncertainty of the narrator's state is achieved in various ways. First, the bed shared by the couple is completely void of any erotic or romantic quality and appears more as a deathbed or coffin. It is where her son died and where their bodies, especially his, are slowly breaking down. Her inability to remember dates and the way time seems to be dragging out accentuate the impression that she might be dead: "Hace más de un siglo, te digo, mil años a lo menos" (22). She also repeatedly questions her reality and sees some of their past, at times dead, friends by their bed: "(Ahora mismo el manco Juan está con su mirada irónica, apoyado en la pared frente a nuestra cama, está manchada la pared y el manco tiene su cara hundida, imposible, borrosa)" (85). Her narration also becomes omniscient on a few occasions. For example, when passing by a car accident while traveling by bus to one of her patients' house, she is able to tell what has happened and identify some injured people on the

street: “un muerto, uno de ellos, el contador de una empresa, no sólo resultó con la cabeza reventada sino también experimentó la mutilación de una de sus piernas” (151). Finally, in the last chapter, her friend Ximena appears in their bed and tells her that she, the narrator, was killed by her partner when she was pregnant and we are thus left wondering if she is dreaming or already dead.

Of course, there are two important elements of the narration that induce the reader to think that these characters are in fact alive: the abundant reference to their changing physical bodies and the pain that they endure. Indeed, as human beings, it is through physical pain that we often become aware of our body and it is also our ability to feel pain that reminds us that we are alive. Thus, the characters’ painfully declining bodies force them to survive as, what we could call “living dead” (muertos en vida), that is, in a liminal or border state between life and death.

There are three types of bodies in pain in the novel: the unnamed narrator’s, her nameless partner’s, and that of the elderly she cares for. Although their experiences, especially his and hers, are closely related to each other, I will, for textual clarity, analyze them separately.

3.3. POLITICAL DEMISE: HIS EMBODIED PAIN

In “La muerte del tiempo útopico en *Jamás el fuego nunca*,” Rivera Soto concludes that Eltit exposes the suffering of a radical experience: “ver desaparecer ante nuestros ojos las bases mismas de la vida, una vida amparada en un macizo corpus de certidumbres que hoy se han desvanecido en el aire” (129). While this experience affects both the narrator and her partner, the collapse of their liberating project and the failure of

their political convictions to materialize manifest themselves most evidently through his physical pain and the deterioration of his body.

Detailed descriptions of his physical suffering are a predominant part of the narrator's account about their present life in the apartment, as well as one of their few subjects of conversation. We learn that his entire body is breaking down and the fragmentation of the narration accentuates this impression as she tends to fragment his body too. He suffers from migraines, arthritis, constipation, and painful legs, among other things. Unable to read anymore, he spends most of his day in bed and barely moves. The words she uses to describe his failing organs further accentuate the terminal phase that his body has entered "tu pierna (…) rígida" (29), "percibo tu palidez" (40), "te encoges en la cama, te demueles" (117). She sees the pain on his face "observo tu cara jaquecosa" (40), and in the way he walks, eats and drinks "bebes, lo haces con el dolor impreso en tu rostro" (44). As pain invades his body, his entire existence is reduced to the physical. His spatial world is limited to the bed and the apartment and, as Scarry and others note often happens to very old and sick people, the exclusive content of his perception and speech have become "what was eaten, the problems of excreting, the progress of pains, the comfort or discomfort of a particular chair or bed" (33). The narrator thus makes it clear that her partner is consumed by his physical pain and that his declining body is all he has left.

The narrator's perceptions of her partner's present physical state are mostly punctuated by her interpretation of his past role as a militant and it becomes clear that, while his life is now his painful physical body, Marxism used to be his essential purpose and sole preoccupation. The way she goes back and forth between the two stages of his life, often within the same train of thought, shows that she sees the two as closely connected. Furthermore, she uses the word "célula" to talk about their political cells and

them as a couple, as well as their individual bodies and refers to the political cells as organic cells or as having bodily properties: "se enfermó nuestra célula por el exceso de soberbia y de autonomía. Tú actuabas en tu rol de matriz o de madre, como se quiera definir" (80). She also clarifies that the last cell he directed was weakened by the treason of one of their members, an explanation reminiscent of her justification of his painful wrist: "la traición de los huesos" (84). As one of his collaborators betrayed him then, his own body is turning against him now. Finally, she chooses to call the overthrow of his leadership and the subsequent death of their political cell as a beheading: "Era necesario, absolutamente. Absolutamente necesario descabezarte" (27). The failing of his present physical cells therefore mirrors that of his political cells.

In fact, even though we briefly learn that he was taken prisoner for a few months and that his face bears signs of torture, it is his fall as a militant leader that seems to have affected him the most. The mental pain engendered by his defeat expresses itself as a physically felt pain. He is not nostalgic about the past as he refuses to talk about it or question it in any way; yet he clearly rejects the present capitalist system and its technology. His need to remain hidden and to continue living as a militant even though he is not part of a political cell anymore indicates that he is unable to accept the fact that his ideals have failed. As he dedicated his youth to the Marxist cause in the hope of bringing his political group to power and ending the capitalist policies promoted by the rightwing dictatorship, accepting the failure of his liberating life project seems too painful to bear. He thus appears to be mourning the death of his political dream and has entered a phase of denial and isolation in which he is blocking out the words and hiding from the facts in order to annihilate his emotions.[60] As Marx himself said: "There is only one antidote to

[60] In her 1969 book *On Death and Dying*, Elisabeth Kuebler-Ross identifies "The Five Stages of Grief" as the process by which people cope and deal with grief and tragedy, especially when diagnosed with a

mental suffering, and that is physical pain" (qtd. In Scarry 33). His physical pain thus obliterates his psychological pain and forces him back to a purely biological level, a level in which only his individuality matters. Thus, although he is mentally unable to face the defeat of his ideals, his crippled body has in a way, through social isolation, physical inactivity and deterioration, accepted the death of his lifelong mission that placed community and productivity at the core of its beliefs.

It is therefore possible to interpret the painful weakening of his body as a symbol of the decline and ultimate collapse of Marxism as a liberating project around the globe, but especially in Chile where socialist president Allende was fatally ousted in 1973 and where many members of the Unidad Popular and other leftist organizations were hunted down and disappeared by the Pinochet government. As previously explained, this authoritarian regime also implemented radical neoliberal economic policies that annihilated previous socialist strategies. Ironically, the foreign economists in charge of this drastic change often referred to then-socialist Chile as being weak and affected by an illness "subordinando simbolicamente todo un país a una figura biológica y psicológica anómala, enferma" (Cárcamo 16). From a capitalist perspective, his lasting belief in Marxist ideology could thus also been seen as an illness that is weakening his body and slowly destroying him.

His aging and pain-wracked body is also a metaphor for the end of the twentieth century that was marked by the fall of Communism and the lack of an alternative or liberating ideology to the now-globalized free market economy. As Eltit explained in an interview: "muchos idearios se desplegaron y se cerraon en el siglo XX. De manera que el siglo se tragó su propia historia" (Lagos, "Conversación" 111). In Chile, those who

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terminal illness or any form of catastrophic personal loss. The five stages are: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. These do not necessarily occur chronologically.

actively resisted the authoritarian regime, including Eltit, dreamt of and fought for a different society that would seek justice for those who fell during the dictatorship and, for some, one that would bring back the economic, political, and social policies in place prior to Pinochet. Yet, as Leónidas Morales explains, "Pronto quedará a la vista que todos aquellos sueños utópicos, los de Salvador Allende y la Unidad Popular, pero también los surgidos de la pesadilla de la dictadura, habían nacido muertos" (25). Indeed, the neoliberal policies implemented during the dictatorship remained in effect during the Transition and have produced deep inequalities and resulted in the economic and social marginalization of many Chileans. Furthermore, justice for those who disappeared and were tortured during the dictatorship has not materialized, as Pinochet died in 2006 without having been convicted of any of the many serious crimes of which he was accused.

Finally, by mirroring the deterioration of the political with that of the male's body, Eltit debunks traditional patriarchal views that conceptualize man as his intellect and woman as her body. She also writes the male body through the perspective of her female narrator creating man as the Other and proving that women writers can write beyond the female body.

3.4. RAPE AND CHILDBIRTH: HER PHYSICAL TRAUMAS

While the narrator is healthier than her partner, she too is experiencing some physical pains as a result of aging. She wishes for example that she could "sentir que tengo un cuerpo, que todavía gravitan en mí las piernas y los brazos y no soy unos riñones adoloridos o cansados o expandidos que me borran de mi misma" (23).[61] It seems

[61] Another topic of fascination would be to consider the cultural specificity in the perception and expression of pain in the novel. Several medical studies document the differences and similarities in the

thus that his pain is understandable to her because she knows it from her own aging experience, and is able to ascribe it to him. Indeed, his physical pains and the deterioration of his body are visible to the narrator, as she is able to record them in great detail. Yet, it becomes evident through the form and content of her narration that the pain she experiences is invisible and inaccessible to him.

First, isolated in his own physical pain, he does not realize that he is the main source of her present distress because, unlike his suffering, hers is not primarily physical anymore. The reader, however, clearly feels and hears her pain through her neurotic way of narrating, in the ways her thoughts go back and forth between the present and the past, in her obsessive questioning, in her allusions to major traumas, and especially in her anger toward her partner. Secondly, the emotional torment that she presently feels derives mostly from past physical pains that she experienced in her female body and that, as a male, he is unable to understand. Thus, while aging has transformed him into a body in pain, unable and unwilling to focus on anything else but his physical deterioration, her aging experience is quite different; it is about assessing her life and she feels compelled to revisit past physical traumas to make sense of present emotional suffering.[62]

Unlike her direct and detailed explanations of his physical pains, she is only able to allude to hers and, from her fragmented narration, it is possible to reconstruct two major physical traumas. First, one infers that while under arrest during the dictatorship for being a Marxist militant, she was repeatedly raped and as a result, became pregnant with her son. It is the memory of her partner's odious question "Por qué no te lo sacaste?" that prompted her to briefly mention her ordeal: "cómo iba a hacerlo, yo era una célula

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words chosen by people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to identify pain and rate its intensity. See for example: Gaston-Johansson, et. al. "Similarities in Pain Descriptions of Four Different Ethnic-Culture Groups." *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*. 5.2 (1990): 94-100.

[62] Although her experience could be, in part, due to the fact that menopause provides some women with a corporeal experience that promotes reflection on the passing of youth.

capturada que no estaba ni viva ni muerta, un simple cuerpo que cayó sometido a demasiados e innombrables agravios, agredido en su biología, la mía. Una biología que funcionaba y respondía" (126). Through his aversion toward her pregnant body and by bluntly asking why she did not abort, he judged her and inferred that she somehow deliberately chose to have her baby. Secondly, she alludes to having to give birth in hiding in their small apartment, with no medical assistance but his inexperienced help. It is again through the memory of his refusal to help at first and his role during the delivery that she refers to her pain: "Tus manos sangrientas de cirujano o de carnicero, tu cara feroz, tu rabia, la abierta decisión que muriéramos, el niño y yo, nuestras muertes salvajes" (135).

Thus, the intense physical pain involved with her rape and the delivery of her son resurfaces through her resentment of his inability, in both instances, to understand the biology of her female body, and for having to justify herself: "no tenía, comprendes, ni una sola alternativa" (119). Echoing Kristeva´s view of pregnancy as a phenomenon that "occurs at the level of the organism, not the subject; it 'happens to' women," it is as if she is the victim of her own female biology (Grosz, "Body" 95); she not only insists that she had no control over her body but also that it is through the physical pains of rape, pregnancy, and delivery that she became aware of her female corporeality: "nunca pensé en el funcionamento autonomo del cuerpo, su cíclica sorpresa y su catástrofe" (121).

Therefore, through her allusions to her past physical pain, the narrator registers the specificity of her sexual body and shows that there exists what Scarry would call an "ontological abyss" between her experience of pain and his perception of her experience. Indeed, although they never spoke about his captivity, she immediately recognizes his fractured cheekbone and the mark left by the metal on his face as signs that he too was tortured: "noté de inmediato que tenías una asimetría nueva en tu rostro" (144). However,

despite knowing that her pregnancy is the outcome of rape while in detention, he seems to think that she wanted this baby: "pero tú no fuiste capaz de hacer lo mismo, no pudiste mantener el rigor de la mirada ni menos retener la frase oprobiosa: 'Por qué no te lo sacaste'" (144). Her need to justify her state also indicates that he did not consider the sexual violence that she suffered as torture.[63] For her, however, the fact that she remembers his exact words so many years later, but appears unable to verbalize explicitly what happened to her in captivity and during delivery, shows not only that these events caused her physical and emotional pain that is impossible to fully express, but also that his inability to recognize her rape as torture added to her emotional pain and prevented her from overcoming these traumas.

Through the past physical pain of her female character and the fragmentation of the narration, Eltit thus not only denounces sexual violence perpetrated against detained women during the dictatorship, but she also implies that this kind of gendered violence was used as a form of torture, a fact that had not been acknowledged until recently. In its 2001 report for example, la Comisión Etica contra la Tortura discloses that over 300,000 people were tortured in Chile between 1973 and 1990. Yet, it does not recognize women as specific subjects of torture due to their gender (Carrera 58).[64] In 2003, a special investigation by the Area Ciudadanía y Derechos Humanos de la Corporación la Morada

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[63] Torture, according to the "United Nations Convention Against Torture" is: "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him, or a third person, information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity." Chile ratified this convention on 30 September 1988.

[64] The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, recognizes rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, "or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity" as crime against humanity if the action is part of a widespread or systematic practice.

and the Instituto de la Mujer[65] revealed however that: 1) sexual violence was a systematic and generalized method of torture during the dictatorship; 2) women of all socio-economical backgrounds, ages, races, and physical conditions were victims of sexual violence as torture and; 3) sexual violence as torture was silenced by the victims who were unable or unwilling to talk, by the professionals who helped torture victims, and by the State post-dictatorship that promoted a "privatización del daño" supposedly for fear that the victims and their families would be hurt again if they talked about it (Carrera 59).

While the narrator's memories of her torture might be too painful to describe, it is also possible to see her incapacity to talk about it clearly as a discursive impossibility. That is, either there are no adequate words to express the abjection of her personal experiences or the existing cultural concepts of torture are not appropriate to describe sexual violence against women, as evidenced in the reports of the commissions that have investigated torture in Chile under Pinochet. Indeed, the above-mentioned investigation also explains that many female rape victims have difficulty discussing and interpreting their sexual violation as torture in part "por las características masculinas del concepto de 'tortura' que manejan las mujeres, ya que, en general, se liga a una concepción masculinizada de la misma que se considera universal, invisibilizando las que vivieron la mujeres en particular" (61). While the way he was treated is part of the extreme measures usually associated with torture such as hanging, electric shocks, and burning, the sexual violence perpetrated against her is not considered torture. The fact that the allusions to her physical traumas are triggered by memories of his reactions to them shows that she resents the power he has to belittle her experience and in a way control her pain. Indeed,

[65] This investigation called "Las mujeres víctimas de violencia sexual como tortura durante la represión política en Chile, 1973-1990. Un secreto a voces" was published within the framework of the 30 year remembrance of the military coup (1973-2003), as a way to recover the historical memory of the repression from a gender perspective.

by interpreting the widespread rapes and sexual abuses committed against women during the dictatorship as less painful or less important than other types of physical torture, society is perpetuating the view that women's experiences are not as significant as those of men and patriarchal discourse is allowed to keep controlling women's bodies.[66]

3.5. MELANCHOLIA AND RESENTMENT: HER EMOTIONAL PAINS

Despite the violent conception and traumatic birth of her baby, the narrator knew she would be able to love him and his presence seemed to provide some hope: "un retazo o un pedazo de mí sabía que iba a resistir porque el niño, el mío, era irreversible e inocente o nada. Nada más que un niño al que no cabía culpar" (140). The love for her son also gave her the opportunity to temporarily have revenge on her partner by shutting him out of their relationship. She insists that the baby was hers, for example, and explains that after his birth, her partner had to sleep on the floor "porque no, no cabíamos los tres en la cama" (126). It seems that the narrator, who did not consider the sexual specificity of her body as an important part of her identity prior to being raped and participated actively in a political movement as many men did, experienced what Kristeva would consider a loss of subjectivity during pregnancy and childbirth and, by becoming a mother, surprisingly endorsed the Freudian idea that "a woman's emotional fulfillment comes not from her sexual relationship but from her maternal role, and specifically her attachment to her male child" (Green 81). Thus, as her personal identity becomes closely tied to that of her child, the lasting pain she experiences after his death is beyond words and extremely damaging to her subjectivity.

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[66] As the 2003 special investigation by the Area Ciudadanía y Derechos Humanos de la Corporación la Morada and the Instituto de la Mujer and other recent studies on repression show, a shift in the understanding of rape and its characterization as a mean of torture is finally occuring. Eltit's novel is one of the vectors for that change.

Some of the symptoms that she experiences in the present include difficulties sleeping, concentrating, and remembering dates, as well as doubting the reality of specific events. These can be typical indicators of emotional stress and it becomes clear that she is in fact still mourning the death of her son and that her grief has become unhealthy. As with her past physical traumas, she is unable to clearly express what has happened to her son, but one can infer from her numerous references to the tragic night of his death that he painfully died of respiratory failure in their bed, most likely from an asthma attack. It is in the way her thoughts constantly bring her back to that night and especially to the fact that they did not take him to the hospital that her emotional pain is most evident and poignant: "por qué no lo sacamos, te lo pregunto, pero cómo no lo llevamos al hospital" (34)[67], "tenemos que llevar al niño al hospital" (44), or "cómo llevarlo al hospital, cómo ingresarlo al hospital y obtener para el niño, el mío, mi niño una cama técnica" (64). She is clearly trying to make sense of what happened that night and wonders why she was unable to protect him from death.

While these intense feelings of impotence and culpability are common to the grieving process of parents who have lost a child, the protagonist is unable to move past them and heal from her long-standing loss. She thus is experiencing what Freud would call melancholy, that is, "a state typified by the person constantly dwelling on the past and cultivating the loss, and so blocking the person's ability to reengage with the world and to love anew" (Vetlesen 41). This is further proven by her resentment toward her partner and her coldness with the elderly she cares for.

As the memories of her son are interrupted in part by those of the couple's shared Marxist militancy, it becomes clear that the two themes are closely related and she

[67] Here the narrator echoes in a different strain the "por qué no te lo sacaste" of her partner.

eventually justifies their inaction that night as the only way to avoid compromising their political cause: "si trasladábamos su agonía, si la desplazábamos de la cama, poníamos en riesgo la totalidad de las células porque caería nuestra célula y una estela destructiva iría exterminando el amenazado, disminuido campo militante" (66). She let her political life and ideological beliefs win over the life of her child, renouncing her maternal responsibility. Since, as Green explains, "the institutions of motherhood and family were of huge symbolic importance during the periods of dictatorship and redemocratization in Chile," the narrator's decision shows some determination to break free from patriarchal structures that have served as powerful modes to subject women and keep them out of the public domain (3). Sacrificing her son to her militancy also points to the difficulties women face in being able to have and balance family and professional lives. Finally through her inaction, she fulfills her partner's earlier wish to "sacarlo" or abort his existence. He was indeed with her that night and she indicates that the ultimate decision not to save the child was a joint one.

It becomes clear therefore that their inaction that night, far from liberating her in any way, drove her into a state of deep emotional pain. Losing her son didn't mean that she stopped being a mother since, as she explains, "lo que nunca podríamos olvidar era su inmanencia" (68). Furthermore, the death of a young child is unnatural and incomprehensible, since the young are not supposed to go before the old. Thus, with this tragedy, her life loses meaning, the future becomes irrelevant and the guilt of surviving her child settles in. Haunted by the memory of his death, she is compelled to reevaluate her past and comes to the realization and internal verbalization that Marxism might not have been a viable solution for Chile and that she might not have ever truly believed in her partner as a supportive and ethical being. Furthermore, a child can symbolize the continued hope for change and her melancholia is thus also due to the unresolved

mourning of the death of her revolutionary ideal, that is to change Chile's political and economic situation.

Indeed, while she, too, was passionate about their revolutionary cause, she now confesses to herself that she disagreed with his assessment of the Marxist doctrine and through her thoughts, conveys a great disillusion with the objectives and outcomes of their movement. She despised his abstract and wordy ways of talking: "Saqué mis propias conclusiones, me afferé a los términos más sencillos para distanciarme de tu hábito, la manía de apoyarte en una densidad con la que dramatizabas cada una de tus intervenciones" (26). She believes his rhetoric to be "un conjunto de palabras selectas y convincentes pero despojadas de realidad" (27) and his ideas and hopes for reforms nothing more than "una mera burocracia en medio de una situación que parecía inconmovible" (27). Contrary to him, she believes that direct actions were necessary for any change to occur and by insisting on the flaws of his leadership, she is in a way blaming him for the failure of their ideals.

Her disenchantment with their movement is also evident in her memories of the discrimination and lack of support she endured from him and other male comrades. While Marx's teachings call for human equality and women's participation in their movement was welcomed in theory, the reaction she received from fellow members when she hoped to become a cell leader shows that access to higher positions was restricted to men: "Cuando el manco Juan, dijo, esta muñeca, pudo decir, incluso, muñequita, percibí cómo naufragaban mis esperanzas y no pude sino resignarme" (84).[68] Furthermore, while she

[68] Several studies about Latin American militancy in the 1960s and 1970s document the gender inequality that existed within various leftist revolutionary movements. In *La guerilla narrada: acción, acontecimiento, sujeto* (2010), Juan Duchesne Winter notes that "women rarely held high-ranking positions within militant movements, and those that did often faced entrenched paternalistic attitudes and behaviors" (qtd. in DiGiovanni 16).

has difficulties remembering important events in her life, she still can recite from memory passages from the Communist Manifesto. Her direct citations not only ironically highlight the fact that the capitalist system has now prevailed, but they also demonstrate her awareness that their loyalty to Marx's teachings was extreme and unquestioning, that there was no room for adapting it to their reality. Thus while his deteriorating body represents the fall of their ideals, her emotional pain points to the inevitability of that failure and can be seen as a critique of Marxism as a Eurocentric model whose overly theoretical views on production and class were not tailored for Latin America's economic reality and cultural diversity.

Her assessment of their past militancy also conveys disappointment in him as a human being and resentment for the way he controls her. Despite her active role in the movement, the physical traumas that she endured for being a part of it, and the fact that she still works, he is unable to see her as an equal and the way he treats her further demonstrates his patriarchal bias. As his health deteriorates, he is dependent on her for most of his basic needs. She is the one who financially sustains them, she cooks, cleans, and cares for him. Yet, he treats her as a servant, as when he orders her: "traeme agua, es que tengo sed" (30) and constantly ignores her questions and comments by saying: "quédate callada" (31). Thus, while she appears to have resigned herself to the her subordinate role in the relationship by explaining: "ya sé qué es lo que me corresponde: la cocina, la tetera, las tazas, el azúcar" (90), the suffering that she incurs from his domination permeates all of her thoughts. The narrator's feelings about her partner's sexist attitude also highlight the well-documented dual challenges that women involved in the anti-Pinochet resistance had to contend with: "to fight against the misogynist violence of the right-wing military junta, and additionally to deal with the paradoxes concerning gender among the parties of the left" (DiGiovanni 16).

In fact, while he is not physically torturing her the way her male assailants did years ago, the way he asserts his power over her, through his misunderstanding of her female body and the way he takes for granted her role as a caretaker, induces her to see him as a an extension of her torturers and the fascist ideas that they represented. This is made evident in the beginning of the novel, when before even alluding to her traumas, she implicitly connects him to Spanish dictator Francisco Franco. First, the female narrator remembers the way her male partner described Franco's death to her when it happened, which is remarkably similar to what is currently happening to him: "La muerte pública de Franco, echado en la cama, muriéndose de todo" (13). Secondly, in the first chapter, she mentions that her partner had told her that Franco died like a dog. Later, she ends that same chapter with the following sentence addressed to her partner: "Ya te habías convertido en un perro, pienso ahora" and repeatedly refers to him as a dog in subsequent chapters (15).

Therefore, as she desperately tries to find meaning in the death of her son and the reasons that prevented her from saving him, she comes to realize not only that the political ideals she fiercely upheld were doomed to fail, but also that the man she followed and respected proved to be as controlling and sexist as many of the men who supported Pinochet. Therefore, her extreme emotional pain and her melancholy come from believing that she sacrificed her son for nothing. As explained in the words of Vetlesen: "My existence depends on the meaning I manage to see in that which happens, that I come into contact with and am affected by. When I no longer have any clear idea of what means something and what something means, my very existence is threatened" (43). Ultimately, the mental angst she feels about the death of her son and the role she played in his passing is as fierce and fatal as the physical pain she experienced through torture and childbirth. She thus finds herself in a state of survival, an in-between state between

life and death in which she resigns herself to the pain of living with her partner and to the role of caretaker that society expects of her.

Through the physical and emotional suffering of her female narrator, Eltit addresses the pain that many Chileans went through during and after the dictatorship and that are frequently mentioned in recent texts treating militancy and repression. She denounces the gender specific torture perpetrated against women by the military junta, the unique repercussions that such practices can have on the reproductive body, and the long-lasting physical and emotional pain that such traumas cause, especially when they are never acknowledged and treated. She also points to the never-ending suffering of losing a loved one without ever being able to know why and how it happened, an anguish that the families of those who disappeared still experience to this day. Finally, she highlights the hardship of moving forward with one's life: the guilt one might feel for surviving while others did not, the lack of meaning one finds when reassessing the past, and the inability to forget one's traumas. She also calls attention to the discrimination many Chilean women still experience in their professional lives, as well as the personal and social difficulties of breaking away from the traditional roles of mothers and caretakers that the patriarchal society has imposed on them for so long.

3.6. TRANSPORTATION OF PSYCHIC PAIN: HER COPING MECHANISM

As was previously explained, the narrator is in a state of deep emotional pain that goes beyond the general phenomenon of survivor's guilt, and in which she seems to interpret her survival as a punishment for not taking her son to the hospital and letting him die. In order to keep living, though, she is forced to find some ways to combat her pain and she does so in part through what Vetlesen calls "transportation of psychic pain"

(75.) This phenomenon describes the way human beings pass what is painful on to someone who is vulnerable, in order to relocate the pain and to find some relief. This relocation of pain can take place in various ways between the two following extremes: "as a one-off occurrence or as something daily and lasting; as something both parties, or just the one, or neither of them are aware of; as something both, or only one, or neither of them can give an account of and articulate plausible reasons for" (75).

One of the ways the protagonist transfers some of her emotional pain back to her partner is by constantly pointing out his failing health and by asking him if a specific body part hurts: "¿Te duele la muñeca? ¿cuánto? ¿cuánto te duele? ¿cómo te duele?, describe pormenorizadamente tus síntomas, el eje del dolor, la manera de desplazarse, sí el dolor, qué hueso exacto" (85). Her questions often appear after she remembers a past event in which he hurt her in some way. For example, she narrates the way he made her feel when, after refusing to dance with her at a party long ago, he invited another woman:"el desprecio y la humillación a los que me sometiste" and, in the following thought: "¿Te duele la cabeza?, te pregunto. Lo infiero, lo supongo por la manera en que te llevas las manos a la sien" (40). She finds some comfort in knowing that he, too, is suffering and by repeatedly reminding him of his physical decline, she controls his pain and is thus able to temporarily alleviate her own.

Another relevant example can be seen in the way she exerts some power over her four elderly patients. First, she talks to them as if they were small children: "hoy tenemos que bañarnos" or "abramos las piernecitas" (51). Her repeated use of the fist-person plural and of diminutives does not communicate tenderness but rather has a demeaning effect and, while this way of speaking is often used in elder care, it sounds especially insincere when juxtaposed with her many crude and at times grotesque descriptions of their bodies: "está escamosa su espalda" (49) or "tiene una cara devastada" (97). She

narrates that none of them really want her to bathe them and that they seem to fear her, as the old man cries and one of the women looks at her with terror in her eyes when she approaches them.

The way she treats them is reminiscent of the humiliating way torturers asserted control over their female victims during the dictatorship. María Isabel Matamala, a Chilean social worker who survived torture, explains that, "era lógico, por ejemplo, que la primera acción del torturador fuera desnudarte y, a través de eso, despojarte de algo que de alguna manera te cubre y que al arrancártelo, significa una protección que ya no tienes y que te deja solo con el ropaje que te entrega tu autoestima" (Carrera 64). While it is the narrator's duty to undress her patients in order to wash them, she appears to enjoy reporting the details of what is for them a painful and shameful experience. Furthermore, she is proud to say that she knows how to get them to do what she wants: "el gran escollo va a radicar en el pantalón y en su negativa a alzar los pies. Lo conozco. Pero sé cómo conseguir que levante las piernas" (95). She shows an intimate knowledge of her patients and knows exactly how far to push them, as torturers often do of their victims' bodies.

Therefore, the narrator is what George Goodin would call a "flawed victim," that is a character "with some defect which helps to bring about suffering" (87). Reati, who expands on this concept in *Nombrar lo innombrable* explains that "Ya no se trata de seres virtuosos que merecen la compasión del lector y promueven su identificación mimética con ellos, sino de hombres y mujeres imperfectos, ambiguosos, irracionales o actitudes esquizofrénicas… cierto rasgo del victimario han sido internalizados por los personajes victimizados" (63-64). It is clear that while caring for these people is a difficult task, it also gives the narrator the opportunity to reproduce and transport some of her pain onto them by temporarily controlling their bodies and inflicting distress. There is therefore a paradoxical and limited analogy between her function as a caregiver to very old and

dependent people, onto whom she can deflect the anger she feels toward her partner, and the horrific nature of what torturers do to inflict pain and humiliation on their victims.

The chronological record of her every move while in their presence and the detailed descriptions of their physical deterioration and misery also allow her to briefly forget and relieve her own suffering. Finally, while her outside occupation as a caretaker is a continuation of what she already does at home, it does give her the opportunity to leave the confined space of the house and briefly step into the outside world. These brief bus excursions in the city are not devoid of suffering, though, since she witnesses the violent death and physical pain of others who fall victims to robberies, car crashes, and domestic violence. As these episodes allow her to temporarily focus on someone else's misfortune, they also show a city in which suffering not only appears at every corner but has become a spectacle, a source of entertainment for bystanders who watch from afar. Violent behaviors and cold fascination with other people's circumstances are endemic to the neoliberal society that thrives on individualism and materialism. Eltit thus portrays a post-dictatorship society in which pain is still prevalent and, as the following analysis will show, where the most vulnerable are marginalized.

3.7. OLD AGE: GENDER-BLIND PAINS

In today's Western society, the assumptions associated with aging are usually based on biological and psychological characteristics that tend to homogenize and normalize the experience of aging into something that is unavoidable and universal. These beliefs are also used to create a knowledge base for health and social welfare professionals that ultimately manifest themselves in today's dominant biomedical discourse by suggesting that persons with such biological traits have entered "a spiral of

decay, decline, and deterioration." This biomedical model "has colonized notions of age and reinforced social prejudice to the extent that decline has come to stand for the process of aging itself" (Powell 30). In an age in which popular culture, including literature, celebrates youthfulness, the old body has thus become "something to be feared and resisted and thus at all costs should be held at bay" (Powell 79). Yet, Eltit, places the marginalized aged body at the center of her novel and takes the decline and deterioration master narratives to an extreme, defying literary conventions and encouraging her readers to question the dominant cultural views on aging. As we shall see, she also highlights the ethical paradox that exists between a neoliberal society that views aging as a universal declining stage that leads most human beings to becoming dependent on others, while simultaneously being reluctant to provide the adequate care for those who have reached that stage.

As previously explained, the narrator visits three very old women and one man on a weekly basis to perform the very intimate task of bathing and changing them. While the narration is extremely fragmented in other chapters, three of these four chapters are uninterrupted and lineal accounts in the present tense of her visits. Through the meticulous documenting of her actions, the reader has the uncomfortable impression of witnessing these private scenes. With each patient, the narrator focuses on four specific aspects of their painful existence and makes it clear that they are slowly dying. First, she insists on their negative physical appearance: the first woman has "la piel áspera" (47) and "los pezones rugosos y oscurecidos" (50), the man has a "cara devastada" (97), the second woman "las manos agarrotadas y torcidas" and "terribles escaras que la destruyen" (137), and the third woman "la cara estragada, sucia" (155). Secondly, she crudely talks about their incontinence and explains how "con la mano despego la caca de una semana, una semana de caca que se va endureciendo hasta formar una costra" (154)

or that "tiene pañales empapados a orines" (95). She also describes the awful smell of excrement that pervades their room. Thirdly, she makes it clear that some do not wish to be washed: one woman "mueve la cabeza negándose" (48) and the man "solloza abiertamente" (95), and that they all have no choice or say in the matter. They all are very sick and are experiencing physical pain. Finally, she infers that they are socially isolated and cared for by standoffish and wary maids or a sister.

Thus, far from excluding the aged body or idealizing it, Eltit offers a horrific view of the corporeal devastation that aging can ultimately induce. She demonstrates that the deterioration of the physical body can lead to the loss of dignity and subjectivity, a fact that also parallels the effect of torture. She depicts the elderly as prisoners of their own bodies and their pain as a tyrant that "mercilessly dictates all significance, all meaning" (Vetlesen 56). As they wait for their bodies to break down completely, these four people are paradoxically dying and surviving at the same time.

Furthermore, Eltit seems to indicate that ultimately, the deterioration of the aged physical body is similar for both sexes. This is not to say that the experience of aging is the same for both. Indeed as de Beauvoir and Susan Sontag have demonstrated in their insightful essays on old age, women and men are not treated equally when it comes to aging.[69] Yet, as Jason L. Powell explains, because gendered bodies have been differently inscribed into and out of the social, women are always embodied while men are not. Therefore, citing Harper's findings, he adds that "men become embodied as they age…through the experience of the experiential and constructed body" and thus "the gap between women and men may narrow, in some ways, as they age" (81). Both the narrator's aging partner and the old man she cares for are indeed saturated with

[69] See *The Coming of Age* (1972) by Simone de Beauvoir and "The Double Standard of Aging" (1979) by Susan Sontag in J.H. Willians (ed.), *Psychology of women*, Norton, 1979.

corporeality and by writing about both the male and the female aged bodies, Eltit shows that old age can be as painful and dehumanizing for all individuals, independently of gender.

Through her meticulous way of washing the elderly, the narrator sees their bodies as dirty and shameful and might fear unconsciously that this deterioration will happen to her own body and that of her partner. The reader experiences a similar unpleasant feeling as Eltit's representation of an abject aged body reminds us of our biological nature and forces us to think about a part of the human experience and suffering that one would prefer to thrust out of consciousness.

Furthermore, Eltit shows that their broken, deteriorating, and pain-wracked bodies reside at what Butler, in her seminal *Bodies That Matter* (1993), refers to "the limits of constructivism," that is "those boundaries of bodily life where abjected and delegitimated bodies fail to count as bodies" (xxiv). This failure to "count" is especially prevalent in free-market economies, including Chile, where neoliberal dominance in social policy has identified "existential concepts such as self-responsibility, self-governance, and self-care that are said to facilitate social action" (Powell 52). Many poor older people are left in a vulnerable situation as "the risk of hardship for the aging in modernity is exacerbated through neoliberal ideas of cutting state finance and enforcing people to use their own funds in the management of their own welfare" (54). In Chile, between 1970 and 1973, the socialist government promoted a socio-economical program aimed at strengthening the politics of the protectionist and socializing state (Cárcamo 21). After the military coup, however, the Chilean pension and health care systems were privatized. This major change led to the country's current dual healthcare and pension systems under which major inequalities among citizens of high and low economic status

have been reported.[70] This disparity prompted socialist president Michelle Bachelet to introduce important reforms to both systems in 2008.[71]

While the elderly in Eltit's novel are not completely destitute, they are lonely and can only afford the narrator's help once a week, having thus to wait seven days for a change of diaper and a bath. Furthermore, her partner does not receive any disability pension and they have to survive on her meager income. Their financial situation worries her as she often recounts her budget and refers to their daily meals of rice and crackers. The author thus points to the economic hardship that the poor middle-aged population faces in Chile and is also critical of her country's social, political, and economic marginalization of its elderly population, showing once more her disapproval of the neoliberal system. Furthermore, the novel was published in 2007 shortly after the 2006 presidential campaign in which health care and pension reforms were some of its most controversial topics.

Finally, given the overt connections that are made in the rest of the novel to the past dictatorship and the deep physical and emotional suffering that the authoritative regime directly and indirectly inflicted on the narrator and her partner, I believe that these marginalized, abjected, aged bodies symbolize in a way the memory of this horrific past that keeps contaminating the present despite the effort of many, including the Transition government, to try to wash it away. In a sense, they also represent our common vulnerability to torture and abuse, either in the traditional forms associated with the

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[70] Chile has maintained a dual health care system under which its citizens can voluntarily opt for coverage by either the public National Health Insurance Fund or any of the country's private health insurance companies. Currently, about 68% of the population is covered by the public fund and 18% by private companies. The remaining 14% is covered by other not-for-profit agencies or has no specific coverage" (Bastías 1289).

[71] Michelle Bachelet's first presidency lasted from March 2006 until March 2010. She was Chile's first female president and, like Salvador Allende, she was a medical doctor before becoming a socialist politician. In November 2013, she was re-elected as president and will serve from March 2014 until March 2018.

repressive state, or in the form of neoliberal policies regarding pensions or health care for example. In this novel, Eltit thus shows how human suffering resides and is felt first and foremost in the body. Through the invidividual physical pain of her characters, she narrates the collective yet silenced story of those who, abused during the dictatorship, are condemned, in the neoliberal democratic state, to survive and die on the margins.

Chapter Four

Biopower, Body Commodification, and Defying the Neoliberal Logic in *Impuesto a la Carne* by Diamela Eltit

If the physical pain and deterioration experienced by the characters in *Jamás el fuego nunca* enable Eltit to write the silenced version of Chile's recent totalitarian past, as I have shown in Chapter Three, the extreme suffering and prolonged abuse inflicted upon the narrator's and her mother's bodies in *Impuesto a la carne* (2010) allow for a powerful condemnation of the past two hundred years of Chile's history. Indeed, Eltit's 2010 novel narrates the painful "recorrido (humano)" (9) of two unnamed women, a mother and her only daughter, who have been wandering about in a hospital since their common birth some two hundred years ago. The mother was not only (re)born when she gave birth to her daughter, she is also living inside her daughter's body. Old, sick, and marginalized for their short stature and dark skin color, these two women are at the mercy of white doctors and their staff, who constantly monitor their physical health and subject them to frequent dubious medical treatments and countless phlebotomies. Published in October 2010, one month after the bicentennial celebrations of Chile's independence from Spain, this novel clearly forces us to reflect upon the historical circumstances that have led to the rise of Chile's current market-state democracy and especially upon those groups that have persistently been exploited or left behind in the postcolonial and in the neoliberal eras.

While the predominant allegorical interpretation of the novel reads the hospital, its doctors and their medical procedures as the unofficial history of Chile that, from its birth as a nation until its present condition as a neoliberal state, has controlled and taken

advantage of the bodies of its marginalized population as a way to avoid social unrest and feed its modernization project, I favor a reading that focuses more closely on the past forty years of Chile's history. Indeed, while the past two hundred years by default include the traumatic dictatorship period (1973-1990) of Augusto Pinochet and its aftermath, this interpretation downplays his tyrannical regime as just another troubled period in Chile's history. Furthermore, in spite of the narrator's insistence on the two hundred year duration of her ordeal, scars and residues of the dictatorship permeate the novel. Eltit's representation of the ruthless physical pain inflicted by "una junta médica" (29) on the bodies of vulnerable "Bajas / feas / seriadas" (25) patients in her hospital are indeed reminiscent of the violent practices and tremendous suffering that occurred in the various prison camps during the military regime. Furthermore, the (mis)management of this hospital and the medical procedures it provides are directly related to radical neoliberal economic policies that were implemented during the Pinochet regime. Therefore, these implicit connections to the dictatorship period allow for a somewhat different or sub-allegorical interpretation in which the for-profit hospital with its white male doctors and their mistreatment of chronically ill non-white female patients can be read as today's right-wing Chile, in which economists, entrepreneurs and politicians, empowered and inspired by the economic reforms of the recent military junta, as well as by centuries-old discriminatory practices, continue to impose neoliberal policies that mercilessly abuse and profit from the "flesh" (la carne) of its racialized, gendered, and economically underprivileged citizens.

In *Bodies in Crisis* (2010), Sutton's analysis of women's resistance in neoliberal Argentina shows that "the neoliberal globalization model is built on a disembodied approach to the social world." In her words, "human bodies disappear under the neoliberal logic, just as the last military dictatorship in Argentina disappeared the real,

material bodies of many people who opposed precisely the preview of that kind of socioeconomic organization" (39). While Sutton's work focuses specifically on Argentina and its severe economic crisis of 2001, the above passages read true for Chile, whose embrace of neoliberalism came about during Pinochet's dictatorship and has now permeated every corner of society. The hospital setting in Eltit's novel therefore allows her to embody neoliberalism and account for the usually invisible bodily experiences of racialized and gendered patients/citizens, while simultaneously showing that the neoliberal model, in its quest for continuous expansion, is now colonizing the inner spaces of the body.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how *Impuesto a la carne* exposes the dependency of the neoliberal model on human bodies in order to function and denounces the violent processes used by the market-state to exclude, exploit, and profit from what it considers "bad" or rebellious bodies, therefore perpetuating and reproducing a hierarchy of bodies that has promoted deep social inequalities throughout Chile's history. I also briefly show that through her writing of the maternal body, Eltit highlights its potential for resistance and for meaningful connections to other human beings. She thus calls for the emergence of a renewed type of activism that brings together marginalized communities to denounce the embodied nature of social injustice created and reinforced through neoliberalism and to potentially attain the social equality that democracy was supposed to deliver.

First, I look at the intricate connections between biopower, biomedical models, and neoliberalism to show how the poor, racialized, and gendered bodies of the mother-daughter characters in the novel are coerced by the market-state and transformed into the ultimate commodity. Michel Foucault's framework of biopower,[72] as well as Mejia

[72] "Foucault coined the term biopower to address that form of power which takes population as its object and operates primarily through the norm (biopower bridges biopolitics and anatomo-politics)." (Holmer

Holmer Nadesan's findings in *Governmentality, Biopower and Everyday Life* (2008), were essential to my analysis.

Secondly, I used Richard's analysis of Eltit's novel in "Una alegoría anarcobarroca de Diamela Eltit," as well Sutton's aforementioned book on the bodily dimensions of exclusion and resistance in Latin America, to look at the maternal and communal mother/daughter body as a means for actively challenging the neoliberal system. Yet, given the novel's overt criticism of the current Chilean free-market economic model and to contextualize some of the issues that I analyze later in this chapter, I start with some general background information about some of the most important economic reforms that have occurred in Chile in the past forty years and define terms such as free-market and neoliberalism that are commonly used when referring to Chilean economy and politics.

PINOCHET'S LEGACY: A RUTHLESS FREE-MARKET ECONOMY

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Eltit views the military coup of 1973 as "an historic rupture and the defining moment of Chile's democracy" (Lynd 13). While the sudden and brutal political shift from democracy to a repressive dictatorship led to extreme violence and oppression, the drastic economic changes implemented by the military regime would also have dire and lasting social consequences.

Between 1930 and 1970, the Chilean economy was under a government-controlled model in which several welfare programs were introduced and administered by the state. According to Cárcamo-Huechante, during this period "la sociedad (chilena, latinoamericana) se había desenvuelto bajo las concepciones del modelo industrializador

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Nadesan 21). Foucault first used this term in his lectures at the Collège de France. It appeared in print in *La volonté du savoir* (1976), the first volume of *Histoire de la sexualité*.

de sustitución de importaciones, influida fuertemente por la agencia de un Estado benefactor o providencial" (83). In 1952, for example, Chile became one of the first Latin American nations to establish a comprehensive national public-health system by providing each citizen with "equal access to health services, regardless of the level of income of the beneficiary" (Solimano 108).

Upon his election in 1970, socialist president Salvador Allende Gossens implemented a series of welfare policies based on the principles of equitable distribution of wealth. His program called "La vía chilena al socialismo" sought to dramatically increase the state's role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social well-being of Chilean citizens by nationalizing the banking and copper mining industries, among others. His various projects included an increase in minimum wages for blue and white collars workers, free milk distribution to school children and land redistribution.

Following the brutal military coup of 1973, however, the conservative regime of Augusto Pinochet immediately sought to reverse Allende's socialist policies. Under the guidance of a group of young Chilean economists trained at the University of Chicago,[73] the regime launched a new free-market model that was heavily influenced by the writings and policy proposals of US economists, especially those of Milton Friedman.[74] The economic plan launched by Friedman and by his Chilean followers is known today as economic neoliberalism and consisted of "dramatic reduction of public spending, privatization of government enterprises, new labor laws that weakened workers' rights, and the deregulation of the economy to attract foreign investment" (Lynd 28). In the 1960s and 1970s, neoliberalism emerged as a new economic movement and a political

[73] This group is also known as the Chicago Boys.
[74] Milton Friedman received the 1976 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences and was professor of economics at the University of Chicago.

orientation in Western nations, especially in the United States. As Eltit explains, Chile became "a sort of laboratory for neoliberalism" where new radical economic policies could be tried out and analyzed by Western economists (Green, "Dialogue" 169).

In late 1978, Pinochet, who was looking to consolidate his government, introduced additional neoliberal policies that further reduced the role of the state and infused competition and individualism into areas such as education, pensions, and health. By late 1979, the regime had transformed the existing and functional national public health program into a dual health care system that consisted of public and private structures and, as I will later explain, that is still in force today.

Chile soon became the fastest-growing economy in South America: the country's GDP grew considerably, the increase in exportations reached historic levels in 1980, inflation was reduced, and the fiscal budget ran consecutive surpluses during this period (Solimano 25-27). Many US and Chilean economists considered Pinochet's economic reforms a great success and Friedman, who backed Pinochet's reforms philosophically and personally, even referred to this period as "the Chilean miracle" (Solimano 27). Yet, as I explained in Chapter Three, it is precisely between 1973 and 1979 that the country experienced some of the most repressive and dark times of the regime with thousands of Chileans being arrested, tortured, killed, and disappeared by the state. In 1980, a non-democratic plebiscite approved a new constitution that granted Pinochet complete executive power until 1990. Surprisingly, this 1980 constitution, which provided a legal framework for the military regime, is still in effect as of January 2014.[75]

The initial economic success of this new free-market model moreover was short-lived as the country entered a severe financial and economic crisis in late 1981. Given the

[75] Although various amendments and changes were made to it over the years.

magnitude of the depression, the regime had no choice but to intervene and instituted a large debt-relief program, as well as a takeover of the management of several privately owned banks that were in distress. These policies were "supported with loans from the IMF, World Bank, and IDB. The social consequences were dire" (Solimano 27). During the mid-eighties, amid strict governmental repression and severe economic hardship, social mobilization as well as international pressure grew stronger and eventually led to the 1988 plebiscite, which overwhelmingly rejected Pinochet's leadership and gave power to a coalition of leftists and centrists that became known as the Concertación (29).

As part of negotiations between the Pinochet government and the opposition about the transition from military regime to a democratic government, it was agreed that Pinochet would remain commander in chief of the army, that the Concertación would refrain from actively prosecuting those responsible for the innumerable violations of human rights that occurred during the military regime, and that it would also "support the fundamentals of the neoliberal economic model in place" (30). These included a reaffirmation of "the Pinochet regime's emphasis on export-led growth through trade liberalization and the internal reallocation of capital and labour that it promotes," as well as continuing the "process of privatization initiated by the authoritarian regime" (Taylor, *Pinochet* 134). Marcus Taylor explains that:

> The social terrain of post-dictatorship Chile is also characterized by hierarchical relations between the large economic conglomerates formed in the Pinochet period and firms in the competitive sector. By 1994, for example, some 7,300 companies of a total of 480,000 (less than 2 percent) accounted for 76 percent of all sales in Chile (Cademartori 2003). These market-dominating companies are in turn controlled through financial ownership by a combination of foreign interests and the two dozen large Chilean economic conglomerates that consolidated their power in the Pinochet period (Fazio 2000). The large conglomerates have been the primary beneficiaries of the Concertación's supposedly neutral macroeconomic policy. (127-28)

Chile's economy experienced a period of dramatic boom between 1990 and 1997 as the above policies yielded some positive results, including increases in wages and the reincorporation of unemployed Chileans into the workforce (Taylor, *Pinochet* 136). It is also well documented that Chile's GDP grew at a historically high average rate of "nearly 5.4 percent annually" between 1986 and 2009, "in contrast to an annual growth rate of only 3.1 percent" between 1940 and 1985 (Solimano 51-52). This rapid economic growth was one of the key factors in supposedly reducing "*official* poverty in the past twenty years, from more than 45 percent in the late 1980s to approximately 15 percent in 2009" (57). Yet, this dramatic decline in the poverty rate put forward by the Chilean government has been disputed as an overstatement by some economists (Larraín n.pag.). It is clear that, while Chile is much more affluent today than it was twenty or thirty years ago, income inequality has not declined but rather has worsened (Solimano 79). Indeed, the highest wage increases went to a limited number of professionals and technicians in the export and financial sectors, while the majority of unskilled workers received below average improvements in wages. This trend perpetuated and further deepened the highly unequal distribution of income that was forged in the Pinochet period (Taylor, *Pinochet* 136). While the late 1990s were marked by another economic recession, which led to stagnation in the early 2000s, the Concertación administrations continued to adapt and deepen various tenets of the neoliberal model. As of 2012, the Chilean economy was marked by highly uneven development in the following sectors:

> High concentration of wealth and the emergence of a small minority of super-rich that controls a disproportionately high share of national wealth; a significant concentration of market participation in banking, pharmaceuticals, health insurance, pension, fund management, and others by relatively few firms and conglomerates that enjoy high market shares; the existence of a production structure in which the segment of micro, small, and medium-size enterprises generates the bulk of employment, but their contribution to total value added is

> low because of relatively low productivity compared with large firms. In addition, the export market is dominated by large firms. (Solimano 134)

These factors have exacerbated social inequalities among the population and led to some social unrest. The Penguin Revolution[76] in 2006 and the university student protests in 2011 and 2012 illustrate the frustration that some Chileans, especially the youth, feel today, not only about various neoliberal policies, such as the school voucher program and for-profit activity in education, but also about living in a highly unequal society. Public pressure and discontent has led to some reforms including some in education, pensions and health care. Yet, these have been modest and have not yet materialized into real social changes.

Given the importance of health and health services in Eltit's novel, it is worthwhile describing here briefly the aformentioned dual health care system created under Pinochet and still in place today. The public component (FONASA), which serves approximately three-quarters of the population as of December 2009, is open to anyone and is funded from general state revenues and a 7% contribution from the taxable income of those who are employed (Solimano 109). The private component (ISAPRES) is a system of privately run providers of health services in which participants instruct their employers to put a payroll deduction into an account with an insurer provider. In this private system, which benefited about 16 percent of the population by the end of 2009, "the purchasing power of beneficiaries is the main determinant of the amount and quality of health services for the population" (109). Therefore, it is not surprising that the main criticisms and visible problems of this dual system are: "the high inequality in access to

[76] The movement, which started in April 2006 was called the "Penguin Revolution" because of the Penguin-like uniform of school students. It began as "a reaction against school bus fares and university fees but evolved into a national movement demanding 'quality education for all'." After several weeks of demonstrations and strikes, Michelle Bachelet's first term government announced "several measures that met some of the students' demands" (Solimano 105).

health services and segmentation according to the income levels of the beneficiary, long waiting lists, limited focus on prevention and high costs and financial uncertainties in covering very high-cost disease treatments" (108). In the 2000s, the AUGE plan was implemented by the Lagos Government (2000-06) to eliminate these problems and especially to ensure the basic right of access to health services for all Chileans. Yet, in practice, given waiting periods and hospital availability, the situation has not really changed. Furthermore, this plan was not accompanied by a serious reform of the ISAPRES to reduce "the fees paid by the beneficiaries" or to increase "the coverage provided by this system to the lower-income individuals beyond what is strictly profitable for the private providers" (110).

Therefore, the reforms implemented in 2005 with the AUGE plan have not destratified access to health care and the health system remains heavily fragmented. According to Solimano, in 2012: "Only the upper-middle classes and the rich can afford the higher quality of care available in the privately provided social service system, whereas the bulk of the middle class and the poor must receive largely underfunded, lower-quality care in the public system" (154).

Despite these inequalities, Chilean society is now accustomed to living under the neoliberal economic paradigm implemented by the dictatorship. This model, which "was built around an idealization of the free market, the promotion of an individualistic ethic, [and] the legitimization of the profit motive extended to a vast array of new activities" has had a profound and lasting impact on Chilean cultural beliefs (Solimano 39). Not only did it radically contrast with the government-controlled market model in place before the military takeover, but it amounted to what Solimano calls a "cultural revolution" (39) or, what Cárcamo-Huechante describes as an "ajuste cultural" (75). According to these scholars, the free-market cultural transformation unfolded most

significantly through cultural discourses that included "the construction of a new 'common sense' around the virtues of the market by public intellectuals and the media" and "the narrowing of political and social debate in Chilean society" (Solimano 40). In accordance with their views, I would like to point out that my references to neoliberalism in this chapter are not solely about an economic ideology but also about a political and cultural philosophy that is centered around the values of a global free-market economy that supports free-trade and unrestricted flow of capital, and that especially seeks to enhance the role of the private sector in society.

In regards to politics, it is worth noting that after governing the country for four terms since 1990, the center-left Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia lost the 2010 presidential election to Sebastián Piñera[77] of the Coalición por el Cambio, an alliance of mostly center-right parties. This return of the right to power was a significant blow for the leftist parties in Chile as it helped consolidate a right-wing group that was already extremely powerful. As Grínor Rojo writes in his 2010 *Discrepancias de Bicentenario*: "Ellos (la derecha chilena) son los dueños de más del noventa por ciento de la prensa escrita que se publica en el país, de buena parte de las radios y de casi todos los canales de televisión. Manejan las grandes editoriales, los colegios y las universidades privados" (158). While this concentration of power in the hands of some of the most conservative members of Chilean society remains mostly intact in regards to the private sector, the re-election of socialist candidate Michelle Bachelet to the presidency in

[77] Piñera received a PhD in Economics from Harvard University in 1976. Upon his return to Chile that year, he was a professor at the Economics Faculties of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, the University of Chile, Adolfo Ibañez University and at the Valparaíso Business School. "During the same period, he was a consultant for the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (1974-1976), a consultant for the World Bank (1975-1978), and he worked for the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)." While Piñera says that he voted against the military regime in 1988, his background in economics shows clear support of neoliberal policies (http://www.gobiernodechile.cl/presidente/en/).

November 2013 offers hope for the future implementation of serious social reforms that could reduce income and wealth inequality, as well as protect Chilean natural resources.

As I conclude this brief summary of recent Chilean economic reforms, I would like to highlight that for many, including Eltit, it became impossible to dissociate the violence of the Pinochet regime from the implementation of the free-market economic model. In *Impuesto a la carne*, as I shall now demonstrate, Eltit not only consistently exposes the background, abuses, and severe shortcomings of the current free-market economy, but also incorporates and denounces the discursive mechanisms tied to neoliberalism that have led to a highly unequal society and to new forms of violence.

IMPUESTO A LA CARNE

As I mentioned earlier, *Impuesto a la carne* narrates the difficult life experience of two women, a mother and her only daughter, who have been living in a hospital since their common birth some two hundred years ago. The mother, who is repeatedly described as an anarchist, was not only (re)born when she gave birth to her daughter, she is also living inside her daughter's body. The daughter, who is narrating their survival in the first person singular and plural, focuses especially on remembering the physical traumas that they both endured during her birth, on their relationship, on their suffering and loneliness over the years, as well as on her plan to eventually denounce the long lasting and constant abuse that they endure at the hand of white medical doctors by writing an account of their lives.

The novel is divided into sixty-three unnumbered short chapters, including many that are less than two pages long. The syntax is often abrupt with sentences lacking verbs or complements and some paragraphs consisting of a single short sentence. The use of

punctuation is at times unconventional with countless words and sentences in parentheses, and the occasional use of the forward slash. There are also numerous repetitions of words and phrases throughout the text, giving it a rhythmic dimension. These techniques intensify the reader's feeling of listening to the narrator speak, rather than reading her words and, as such, is evocative of testimonio literature. The daughter in fact declares her narration to be a testimonial: "Me he propuesto ser muy cuidadosa y realista en cada una de mis afirmaciones porque quiero dejar como regalo a la humanidad o a parte de la humanidad o a un fragmento irrisorio de la humanidad uno de los testimonios más concretos o certeros acerca de nuestra historia" (32). These practices also help solidify the presence of a traumatized narrator whose confusion, although in part due to her advanced age, is mostly the result of prolonged and ongoing physical exploitation. Finally, some of these techniques are at odds with the rules of syntax and punctuation considered proper for prose writing in Spanish and challenge the hegemonic form of the traditional novel.

One of the striking aspects of *Impuesto a la carne* lies in the way that time is presented as non-linear. The past two hundred years appear as a perpetual present of discriminatory practices, mixing past and present into one and thus negating the Western notion of history as an organized succession of events that necessarily bring about progress in terms of quality of life, democracy, liberty, modernization, etc. This representation of time alludes to Walter Benjamin's materialist and anti-teleological philosophy of history that rejects the notion of the past as a continuum of progress and instead sees it as "synonymous with catastrophe and ruin, the successive accumulation of residues of the broken lifeworlds of the past" (Kaup 92). This representation of time also destabilizes the notion of memory as something that refers only to the past. In *Crítica de la memoria* (2010), Richard explains that:

> La separación entre pasado y presente no puede ser controlada por el corte nítido del hoy porque la división de los tiempos se ve siempre contagiada en sus bordes por adherencias e impregnaciones de la memoria diluida que enturbian los límites del recuerdo. (…) La memoria designa una zona de asociaciones voluntarias e involuntarias que se mueve entre el pasado y el presente, ambos concebidos como formaciones incompletas en las que se entrelaza lo *ya consumado* con lo *aún no realizado*. Es porque el pasado es inconcluso que el trabajo residual de la memoria se mueve de escena en escena, a la búsqueda retrospectiva de aquellas intermitencias que aún contienen energías latentes. Las combinaciones discrónicas de temporalidades históricas y sociales que parecían muertas llevan a que se asome nuevamente – como retardamiento o aceleración – lo que no había sido aun modulado por la cirunstancias y que las permuras del hoy reubican fuera de lugar y tiempo para que la rareza de estos des-tiempos tenga la oportunidad de convertirse en una fuerza crítica de extrañamiento. (15-16)

Thus, as she connects forms of oppression in the present to the memories of a long and silenced history of discriminatory practices, Eltit forces us to look at and understand the forgotten past as still being part of our present, and to hopefully find in it alternatives for the future.

The novel is also highly allegorical. Eltit resorts to what Tierney-Tello calls "typical ingredients and techniques of allegory" to represent a symbolic power. These include "abstraction, incorporation of commentary and interpretation, [and] the use of personifications rather than realistic protagonists" (*Allegories* 17). The narrator explicitly and repeatedly associates the word hospital with those of nation, country, territory and homeland, as shown in this example: "La patria o el país o el territorio o el hospital no fueron benignos con nosotras" (18). By using the conjunction "or," she clearly presents each term as alternative ideas and it becomes obvious, throughout the novel, that the hospital in the novel is an allegory for Chile, and the main characters bicentennial bodies a personification of the past two hundred years of the country's unofficial history.

As Avelar explains in *The Untimely Present* (1999), the recourse to allegory is symptomatic of postdictatorship Latin American fiction. Summarizing part of Avelar's

findings, Monika Kaup notes that the dictatorships in Chile, Argentina, and elsewhere "constitute a turning-point and catalyst for the inauguration of a new kind of literature of disenchantment that breaks with avant-garde 'boom' practices such as magical realism" (93). Allegorical writing allowed for "speaking otherwise" which, Avelar notes in his aforementioned book, "should not only be understood as a mere search for alternative forms of speech but also as speaking of other (in the double sense of the genitive), and, first and foremost, as speaking to the other, of answering the call of the other" (232). Avelar argues that allegory in postdictatorship literature is directly related to the task of mourning and that "the necessary remembering of the horrific and obliterated past causes these fictions to read their surroundings as allegorical ruin, and in turn to erect a memorializing, "allegorical crypt" in their effort to mourn the catastrophe at hand" (Tierney-Tello, "Rev." 456).

While Avelar's arguments are based on texts written during the dictatorship periods of various South American nations, as well as during the initial phases of their transition to democracy, the essential link that he makes between mourning and allegory in the aftermath of the dictatorship is still valid for texts such as Eltit's *Impuesto a la carne* that address issues related to their country's recent history and that, although not confronted with the literary censorship of a military regime, are faced with the indifference to justice of a market-state that cannot admit to and criticize its true origins. Moreover, literature in today's free market economy is a lucrative business and resorts to cost-effective marketing practices that support only those literary projects that are deemed profitable. It also views women's writing, as Eltit explains, "como subproducto, como decoración" ("Contante" 391). Censorship is therefore not political anymore, but rather economic.

In the predominant allegorical interpretation of the hospital as Chile's two hundred year old history, Avelar's vision of the allegory as a way to mourn and remember the horrific past of Chile's recent dictatorship expands itself to encompass the past two hundred years. Indeed, this broader period covers several other violent events[78] and long lasting discrimination against marginalized populations that have been silenced by the various dominant political and cultural discourses that have governed Chile over the years, including nation-building, right-wing and left-wing narratives. Yet, if we pursue, as I do, a sub-allegorical interpretation that focuses on the past forty years, Eltit's allegorical novel "rescues" the defeat of the dictatorship "out of oblivion" in a effort not solely to mourn and come to term with Chile's recent violent past, but to expose the residues of authoritarian practices in Chile's present market-state economy.

While taking into consideration the main allegory, my subsequent analysis will mostly focus on the second allegorical interpretation, as well as on the more hyper-realist or satirical portrayal of the ways in which the neoliberal paradigm, through its biomedical and biopower technologies, makes the bodies of its most vulnerable disappear by feeding them to the market as the ultimate commodity.

COMMODIFYING THE MARGINALIZED BODY

As I have pointed out in previous chapters, the recent military dictatorships in Argentina and Chile used a rhetoric of illness and contamination to justify state sponsored violence, as well as the torture and physical disappearances of many of its

[78] Including, among others, the infamous Santa María School Massacre in Iquique on December 21, 1907, in which military troops machine gun fired on striking miners and their families, killing between two and three thousand people. Following the massacre, the government buried the fallen in a mass grave. This incident "had no place within public and official memory. [It] was never mentioned in school textbooks, nor in official historiography, but mentioned only in the working-class press and in the oral history and *canto popular* of some leftist groups" (Draper 98).

citizens. Indeed, "the image of the state as a human body suffering from the infection of subversion came to permeate the public statements made by Southern Cone leaders" (Weiss Fagen 45). This use of medical terminology, which is reminiscent of nineteenth-century positivist speeches made by founding figures such as Sarmiento in Argentina in their quest to civilize native populations, was also an important part of the discourse and imagery used by foreign and Chilean economists in the 1970s to justify and impose their free-market economic model.

During one of his official visits to Chile in 1975, Friedman stated that: "Chile es un país enfermo y un enfermo no puede esperar recuperarse sin costo" (Cárcamo 103). According to Cárcamo-Huechante, by using this medico-patient metaphor, Friedman "inviste su locación discursiva (el privilegio geocultural del Norte) con el poder del saber médico-económico, subordinando simbolicamente *todo un país* a una figura biológica y psicológica anómala, enferma, el paciente en necesidad de 'tratamiento de *shock*'" (103). Thus while the military sought to treat a national illness by physically eliminating bodies it deemed "contaminated" by (foreign) socialist ideals, the economists prescribed their drastic neoliberal shock treatment to cure what they viewed as socialist economic "infections." Furthermore and as Frazier notes "The Argentine and Chilean states' shifts from military to civilian rule shared the rhetoric of reconciliation as 'healing,' a means adopted by civilian leaders for coping with the political challenges posed by collective memories of state violence (…). Healing metaphors inadvertently perpetuated the military narrative of the nation as a body subject to intervention" (398).

Given the insistence that Chilean political and economic forces have placed over the years on Western biomedical discourses to define idealized models of political and economic health and their reliance on docile physical human bodies to treat the "diseases" that, in their view, negatively affect that model, it seems only fitting that Eltit

would chose a hospital as a locus of power for her novel and as a metaphor for Chilean society. Indeed, in the medical rhetoric used by politicians and economists, as well as in the actual medical discourse used by doctors, the body takes center stage and is used, in Foucauldian terms, to produce knowledge, create disciplinary policies, and monitor individuals.

In Eltit's novel, as I have previously explained, the tall white medical doctors, their followers, and the various treatments they ascribe to in order to cure suspect illnesses remind us of the US and US-educated doctors in Economics who, backed and admired by the Chilean military junta, relentlessly tried out new neoliberal policies that, in their view, would restore Chile's economic health and bring about prosperity. In this section, I show that, through the portrayal of an omnipotent medical institution in which white male physicians have complete and permanent control over their racially-marked female patients, Eltit illustrates and complicates Foucault's framework of biopower[79] and findings on the Western biomedical model to unveil methods of social control that enable the state to shape and discipline docile bodies. Yet, she also simultaneously highlights the continued significance of direct physical violence as a way to silence racialized and gendered bodies and demonstrates how the rise of the neoliberal state has led to a new formulation of the clinical gaze that specifically seeks to violate and colonize marginalized bodies not necessarily to "improve" or "assimilate" them, but rather to use them as the ultimate commodity and profit from them.

The narrator's traumatic hospital birth in the early nineteenth century coincides in time not only with the birth of Chile as a nation, but also with what Foucault refers to as the birth of modern medicine. In his canonical work *The Birth of the Clinic,* first

published in French in 1963, Foucault outlines the biomedical perspective and explains the history and nature of the implicit contract that existed until recently between the individual and the Western state in the provision of health care.[80] In order to obtain and maintain its citizens' loyalty, the state provided them protection and care through its institutions such as hospitals and asylums. Foucault notes however that this relationship was often conflictive because, owing to the state's limited resources, decisions in regards to treatment availability had to be made and patients' needs and expectations could not always be met. Most importantly, Foucault's findings show that the biomedical model used in Western medicine since the early nineteenth century seeks to achieve knowledge and control of the patient's body through the clinical gaze. In today's medical context, the clinical gaze refers to "the day-to-day rational-scientific practices associated with the work of doctors in the hospital or clinic," which include modern tools and tests used to diagnose patients' illnesses. In this sense, medical institutions "exercise power not through overt coercion but through the moral authority over patients associated with being able to explain individual problems (such as an illness) and then provide solutions (i.e. treatment) for them" (Crinson n. pag.). According to Foucault, the clinical gaze creates the empirical vigilance of the state and the hospital is therefore intrinsically connected with larger social and political structures that operate in society. In her novel, Eltit highlights these connections with her representation of Chile as a hospital.

Since Foucault's various publications and lectures on this topic, much research has been undertaken in the humanities and the social sciences internationally to show how Western biomedical models routinely objectify and dehumanize patients through a number of procedures that include the regulations of food, sleep, activity, dress, and

[80] Although Foucault's work focuses on French history and on the French biomedical model, it has been widely accepted that, given the popularity and application of his work in Western academia, part of his findings can be generalized to other Western states.

environmental setting. These techniques of biopower whose aims are to monitor, discipline, and contain perceived dysfunctional bodies are common to institutions such as hospitals and asylums, and are done to manage diseases. Research also has shown that "biomedical models constitute a powerful means by which knowledge and ideologies, particularly about gender, race, and other measures of 'normal' bodies are produced and circulated" (Gabbert 209). As I will show in my subsequent analysis of Eltit's novel, race and gender are crucial factors in the ways doctors not only perceive their patients, but also in the kind of care they prescribe.

While Western biomedical models are still powerful in today's globalized free-market economy, neoliberal ideologies and practices have greatly weakened the tacit "contract" that existed between the individual and the state in the provision of health care and have broadened the empirical vigilance of the state to benefit other players. As Holmer Nadesan explains:

> Neoliberal market logics inflect and transform older social-welfare apparatuses and technologies of government by informing the values, decisions, and practices of individuals operating within "nonmarket" realms of society, including state apparatuses (e.g., public office, public agencies, educational institutions) and "private" life (e.g., families, religious organizations, popular culture).
>
> Neoliberal technologies emphasizing government from a distance (supplemented with targeted governance), accountability, and transparency infuse biopolitical and disciplinary practices enacted across the realms of everyday life. For instance, neoliberal economic governmentalities influence how public-health officials represent populations from afar and develop strategies of targeted governance for "at-risk" populations, promising new cost efficiencies while shifting responsibility of health management to privatized, responsibilized individuals (212).

She furthers adds that these "responsibilized" individuals, to use her term, govern themselves through "convenient and promising commercial products and technologies. Yet, the personal identities and lifestyles within which these are embedded, and which they extend, are not devoid of political inflection" (212). Therefore, contemporary biopolitical understandings and products are predicated upon the existence of two different types of subjects. On the one hand there exists an implicit formulation of a

rational "good" subject competent to monitor his or her own physical and mental health.[81] On the other hand, there are also formulations of "bad" subjects who are deemed to be incapable of rational self-government, or capable only of limited self-government. According to Holmer Nadesan, these " bad" or risky subjects are targeted for increased surveillance and disciplinary normalization by biopolitical authorities who may be employed by the state or by private philanthropy" (212). She further states that: "Irrespective of funding, biopolitical authorities are increasingly answerable to neoliberal regimes of accountability, requiring market efficiencies and calculable outcomes. […] "Bad" subjects who fail to respond to biopolitical reforms are subject to more repressive authorities and/or interventions" (212). At times, although these "bad" subjects are simply left to fend for themselves, rather than being more closely controlled.

As I have explained earlier, one of the fundamental goals of the neoliberal project in Chile was to limit the state's responsibility for social programs. The new economic policies and practices implemented during and after the dictatorship therefore led not only to the increased privatization of healthcare, but especially to the "formation of new subjectivities that posit individuals as the fundamental units of society" (Roberts 22). In accordance with Nadesan's view of "responsibilized" individual stated earlier, Elizabeth Roberts, who studies neoliberal health policies in the Andes, notes that these new subjectivities "posit good citizen as self-reliant, educated, and entrepreneurial patients who need very little from state institutions" (22). On a broader economic level, this view implies that individuals possess similar opportunities at investing and improving their

[81] "The monitoring performed by this rational and reflexive subject is always couched in relation to the exigencies of work and private life, the demands of the workplace, and those of privatized relationships. This rational subject selectively peruses the marketplace of ideas and goods for biopolitical strategies that normalize and/or optimize, facilitating the subject's good self-government at work and home. The particular characteristics of this subject are always inflected by the particularities of time and place" (Holmer Nadesan 32).

human capital in order to be or become such "good" or "responsibilized" citizen." Yet as Eltit eloquently points out in her novel and as I will show, the neoliberal system is founded and thrives on centuries-old discriminatory practices that are rooted in the body and, as such, cannot equally reward all individuals in the same ways.

Foucault, who also lectured extensively on the topic of neoliberalism at the Collège de France, explained that: "in practice, the stake in all neoliberal analyses is the replacement every time of *homo oeconomicus* as partner of exchange with a *homo oeconomicus* as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings" (*Birth Bio* 226). The success of the neoliberal homo oeconomicus is therefore based on one's human capital, which is made up of innate elements, including one's genetic make-up, and of other elements acquired through education and adequate care. This human capital is then embodied in the ability to perform labor so as to produce economic value.

Both innate and acquired elements of human capital therefore vary greatly among individuals at any given time. Furthermore, the ability and opportunities that one has to acquire and improve on one's competencies to produce economic value depends in part on whether or not the market-state is investing sufficiently in human capital and whether these investments, which are made through economic, social, cultural, and educational policies, equally benefit all individuals. In terms of health care, for example, Foucault states that:

> We can analyze medical care and generally speaking, all activities concerning the health of individuals, which will thus appear as so many elements which enable us, first to improve human capital, and second, to preserve and employ it for a as long as possible. Thus, all the problems of health care and public hygiene must, or at any rate, can be rethought as elements which may or may not improve human capital. (230)

While the neoliberal ideology appears to support policies that are oriented toward improving human capital and promotes the idea of individual economic responsibility, the experiences that the narrator and her mother go through in Eltit's novel clearly demonstrate that the neoliberal paradigm not only continues to discriminate against some of its subjects, but paradoxically also intentionally sacrifices some of them to economic marginalization and dependency. Indeed, while racism and sexism have obviously existed in Chile for well over two hundred years, the current neoliberal discourse does little to account for the impact that these discriminatory practices have on a person's potential for economic success. Advocates of capitalist globalization and neoliberal development strategies, such as those implemented in Chile, are usually concerned with "market indicators, communication and technological innovations, business infrastructure, and profits" (Sutton 38). As Sutton explains, "the neoliberal globalization model is build on a disembodied approach to the social world" (38). The neoliberal discourse is therefore highly conceptual and often fails to understand how people experience capitalist globalization in and on their bodies (38). Yet, in practice, "the globalization of the capitalist economy depends on human bodies" (38). Therefore, while the neoliberal model might not take into account the bodily experiences of the people adversely affected by economic globalization, its policies and individualistic philosophy, "facilitate the exploitation and deterioration of some human bodies" (39). Indeed, as my analysis of Eltit's novel will show, the new market-state, while focused solely on measures that have economic impact, continues to discriminate on the basis of "innate" elements of human capital, namely racial traits and gender. Furthermore, and in terms of health care, the clinical gaze in Eltit's hospital/nation seeks to improve the human capital of some at the direct expense of others. As I now move to analyze the dysfunctional hospital portrayed in the novel, it is important to keep in mind that Eltit uses it primarily as a metaphor for

Chilean society during and after the dictatorship period, and not as a realistic representation of medical institutions in Chile.

Racialized bodies

Zillah Eisenstein notes that "Racism uses the physicality of bodies to punish, to expunge and isolate certain bodies and construct them as outsiders" (21). From the moment they are born, the mother and daughter in the novel are diagnosed by white medical doctors with what they believe to be physical disabilities that impede them from living what Eltit's market-state considers to be healthy productive lives. First, these doctors deem their short stature and especially their dark skin color as serious, repulsive, and potentially contagious infirmities:

> Ese es un aspecto de nosotras que les molesta (a los fans y a los médicos) de manera maníaca, los altera al punto que turba sus miradas y después de examinarnos se lavan y se lavan y se lavan las manos que tienen de manera agresiva. […] Clasificadas en sus archivos así: curiches, curiches, curiches, nombradas como curiches por esos hombres que proyectan un fluorescente halo médico, un halo empecinado que nos desdeña y nos margina de los asientos más cómodos de sus consultas. (33)

These physical attributes point to the probability that the narrator and her mother are of Mapuche[82] origin and consequently part of Chile's lowest economic stratum. The term "curiche," originally a Mapudungun word meaning dark people, is used in Chilean Spanish today as an offensive and derogatory term to describe a person of dark or black skin color. As the narrator suggests in the previous quote and by constantly calling them "negras curiches" (33), not only do the white doctors diagnose them as being ill for

[82] "The Mapuche people were the first inhabitants of half of the area today known as Chile and Argentina. Before the Spanish arrived in 1541, the Mapuche occupied a vast territory in the Southern Cone of the continent and the population numbered about two million. At present they number approximately 1.5 million (constituting over 10% of the total population) in Chile, and two hundred thousand in Argentina. The Mapuche nation now constitutes the third largest indigenous society in South America" (http://www.mapuche-nation.org/english/html/m_nation/main/history.htm). The Mapuche language is called Mapudungun.

physical attributes that are inherent to their identities and origin as possible Mapuche Indians, but also they are treated differently because of them. Their access to medical care is delayed and compromised by doctors who, unwilling to view them as equal human beings, only see the potential benefits that they can extract from their racialized bodies. As the narrator explains, "Tenemos que darle la sangre nuestra, la última para que la comercie sin argucia alguna. Que una de las enfermas sencillamente venda la sangre como cualquier producto y no tenga que fingir que cumple un protocolar trabajo hospitalario" (72). In contrast, patients such as cousin Patricia, who is much taller and according to the narrator "era un ser mejor modelado por la selección genética de la naturaleza," are well treated by the medical personnel: "sus enfermedades nunca la invalidaron, nunca, porque los médicos le daban la medicina exacta" (45). In this sense, as I will later explain, the mother's and daughter's racialized bodies become the prime organic resources of an unethical hospital/market whose profits come from selling blood and organ trafficking.

As doctors draw ever more blood from the narrator's and her mother's bodies and subject them to painful procedures, the two feel increasingly sick, confused, and lonely. Furthermore, despite their resistance to the (mis)treatments they receive, they have become dependent on doctors and medicine for survival and at times even have adopted the medical lingo and negative vision of themselves that the medical community has been using to identify them: "somos cuerpos hechos para la medicina" (52). It is therefore also possible to view these racialized bodies as the ancestral land of the Mapuche people who over the past two hundred years, but especially in the last four decades, has been expropriated and exploited by the Chilean government.

First violently persecuted during colonial times, the Mapuche Indians have endured severe discrimination by the Criollo Chilean elite since the country's

independence.[83] According to the Mapuche International Link, an organization whose purpose is to promote the interests of indigenous peoples and nations of Chile and Argentina, as of 2002 in both countries "the Mapuche continue to be a people who socially and politically suffer the consequences of repression and the imposition of assimilationist policies. The ethnocidal policy systematically applied by the military regimes against indigenous peoples continues to this day, demonstrated by the violation of their human rights and fundamental freedoms" (Mariqueo n. pag.). In the novel, this policy is illustrated in the ways in which the mother/daughter are violently silenced, forced to give up their blood, and remanded in a hospital that seeks to convert them "en ruinas nacionales" (107). These national ruins become temporary sites of attraction and pride during the bicentennial celebrations, which are satirized by Eltit as the media exploitation of the Mapuche people, who are temporarily "celebrated" in order to sell images of a diverse and tolerant nation proud of its indigenous heritage. In the narrator's words:

> Nos dieron tres, cuatro o cinco segundos de tiempo para hablar, tres, cuatro o cinco segundos para salir en los livianos, livianos, livianos noticiarios y podríamos alcanzar una mención en el universo ecónomico de un blog […]. Nos otorgaron un ingreso controlado al profuso mercado de obsesiones tecnológicas que manejan los fans, ese universo que los impregna de energía y los consume. (108-109)

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[83] "A century after their arrival, the Spanish signed the Treaty of Quillin (1641) which defined frontiers with the Mapuche nation. With the defeat of the Spanish by the newly formed states of Argentina and Chile in 1810, the original treaties of 1641 were abrogated. The new Republics instigated treaties leading to the gradual takeover of the Mapuche territory. Under the pretext of promoting civilization and Christianity, the Mapuche people suffered territorial conquest, military aggression and persecution resulting in the destruction of entire communities. At the end of the 19th century Chilean and Argentinian armies seized the Mapuche territory, a dispossession recorded in Chilean history as the Pacification of the Araucanian, and in Argentina as the Campaign of the Desert. The Mapuche nation was finally defeated by both armies in 1885 and many people were either killed or forced from their homes to live impoverished lives in small rural communities and in the cities" (Mariqueo n. pag.).

Once the bicentennial and its ephemeral media coverage are over, the fate of the mother/daughter in the novel, echoing that of the Mapuche people in real life, remains unchanged and the task of surviving and resisting against constant human rights violations continues, as recent Mapuche uprisings have also shown.[84]

A 2002 report by the Human Rights Documentation Center (HRDC) notes that since the late nineteenth century the only significant actions to improve the situation of the Mapuches were those undertaken by Salvador Allende. During his brief tenure, Allende "sought the restitution of ancestral lands and the recognition of the Mapuche's autonomy" (n. pag.). Yet, these efforts were undone by Pinochet, who in 1979 enacted a decree "which broke up communal reducciones [reserves - comunes] into private plots and gave wealthy Chilean farmers title to the land. According to one government official, 'over a 10-year period [the government] took away 5,300 cooperative farms [and acquired] 400,000 hectares (988,000 acres) ... by pure fraud'" (HRDC n. pag.). Moreover, during the dictatorship, many Mapuche leaders were "branded as leftists" and persecuted, and it is estimated that at least 300 of them were reported missing or murdered. The repeated way in which the narrator refers to her mother and herself as natural anarchists and links this condition to their medical persecution is thus reminiscent of what occurred to so many Chileans, Mapuches and others, who were perceived as natural-born rebels against the ruling power of

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[84] In 2009, "Mapuche activists occupied land, torched forests and farmhouses, and destroyed forestry equipment and trucks, in what was billed as Chile's worst security crisis in decades. The heavy-handed police response has marred the otherwise positive human-rights record of the centre-left government of Michelle Bachelet and has sparked criticism over government methods to prosecute activists. Clashes with police have left several Mapuches dead and dozens have been detained and imprisoned under an anti-terrorist law that dates from the military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet (1973—90)." (Moloney 449). Since then, other protests and violent incidents have been reported. In response to these events and to the January 2013 deadly attack of "an elderly couple whose family's landholdings in Southern Chile have long been targeted by Indigenous Mapuche people," President Piñera announced further anti-terrorist measures and "the creation of a special police anti-terror unit backed by Chile's military" ("Arson" n. pag.).

the military regime: "Mi madre nació anarquista. Las dos nacimos anarquistas. Por la sangre" (14).

Pinochet's land decree and his brutal repression have had a lasting and devastating impact on the Mapuche community. Not only did many of its members reject their culture and try to assimilate by moving to cities in order to avoid persecution, but this land decree also gave way for the unprecedented exploitation of natural resources by their new owners. Indeed, "Chilean farmers sold these lands to large forestry corporations subsidized by Pinochet's government. The lands were planted with renewable, non-native species like pine and eucalyptus that have permanently altered the region's eco-system and the Mapuche's traditional way of life" (HRDC n. pag.). As of early 2014, these large corporations, including various multinationals, are enjoying huge profits and benefiting from a low taxation rate by the Chilean government. For their part, many Mapuches who moved to the cities "have been relegated to menial jobs," and "have adopted Spanish names, converted to Catholicism and stopped speaking their native language"(HRDC n. pag.).

In regards to health care, it should also be noted that the loss of Mapuche territory has led to new types of health issues that are also often considered common in victims of physical violence. According to Mapuche leader Doralisa Huenulen: "We're seeing more cases of mental health problems, depression, stress, and trauma caused by the loss of contact with our land, a sense of loss and identity and the lack of self-autonomy, which is made worse by poverty" (Moloney n. pag.). In the novel, the mother is the one most affected by these various symptoms: "Nosotras estamos aquí para permitir y hasta estimular que nos sigan tratando como subpacientes o subspecies, qué nos importa, dice mi mamá" and, as the daughter futher explains: "Mi madre divaga enfrascada en su senilidad, se refiere a antiguas estrategias ácratas. Habla de la comuna. Quiere volver a su comuna. Nos perdemos de nosostras mismas" (36). As doctors profit from the organic

resources of racialized bodies, so does the market-state from the ancestral land of the Mapuche. In both cases, this exploitation of the racialized body/land leads to its physical suffering, economic dependency, and a loss of identity.

The loss of ancestral land has also made the practice of traditional medicine increasingly difficult. As Huenulen further explains: "We've relied on the land for centuries for our traditional medicine. With deforestation, and our native lands, forests, wetlands taken away and reduced to small holdings, the herbs we use have all but disappeared" (Moloney n. pag.). Often unable to find or resort to traditional medicine to address and relieve health problems, many Mapuches reluctantly seek help from Western medicine. Yet, as Alejandro Herrera, director of the Institute of Indigenous Studies at the University of the Frontier in southern Chile, notes: "the overall quality of health services Mapuches receive is worse in comparison to non-Indigenous people." In his view, "there's a lack of understanding between Mapuche patients and doctors trained in western medicine who have different concepts of illness" (qtd. in Moloney n. pag.). Indeed, the Mapuche perception of health and illness is related to notions of harmony, in which being ill does not have a biological explanation but rather is caused by supernatural powers. While this indigenous view of health and illness does not appear in the novel, the confusion that the mother and daughter experience in regards to the medical treatments and procedures that they receive indicate that their cultural beliefs could be one of the many factors that makes it difficult for them to articulate their suffering and symptoms to doctors trained in Western medicine and for those doctors to even consider listening to these patients.

As Eltit illustrates in her novel, today's modern Western biomedical system is what Anthony Giddens calls an "expert system," which "heavily depends on specialized and expert knowledge of disease, meticulous and disciplined scientific reasoning, and the

discovery and application of technology" (qtd. in Gabbert 211). In this model, which in many ways is in direct opposition to the Mapuches' traditional health vision, "disease is defined as deviancy from an idealized model of health and is explained by focusing on physiological processes and biochemical mechanisms" (Gabbert 211). Yet as Eltit shows, notions of what "an idealized model of health" or of what "disease" are extremely problematic, as they are increasingly dictated by economic factors and shape societal norms. Furthermore, for some this idealized model is simply unattainable. In Eltit's hospital/nation, no adequate medical treatment will "cure" the mother and her daughter's bodies "diseased" by old age, low class status, and origin as Mapuche Indians. The numerous doctors, nurses, and followers are trained to observe their patients as dismembered bodies and to assign economic potential to specific body parts or organs, rather than to understand or potentially help them. As the narrator explains: "entendí con una claridad iluminada que ese médico iba a poner precio a mis orgános" (102). And, as she wonders which of her organs is most profitable for the doctors "mis retinas," "mis poderosos pulmones," she knows that her reproductive organs have no commercial value as no one would wish to replicate her, if even partially: "los ovarios valen una miseria" (102).

While the exploitation and appropriation of these women's body parts parallels what recently occurred to the Mapuche ancestral land, as I explained earlier, these methods also refer to the booming global blood and organ trade, a "multi-billion dollar industry commonly known as the 'red market' [which] often blurs the lines between legal medical practices, shockingly criminal suppliers and naïve or desperate victims" (Niebylski 114). Indeed as Niebylski eloquently remarks:

> Viewing organ trafficking from the viewpoint of those too ill, too poor, or too old to have any say about the fate of their organs while alive or dead, Eltit's novel

> shows no ambivalence on this account. In the novel's hospital the medical personnel intent on bribing the neediest, ailing, and aging bodies to give up the few remaining healthy organs they possess appear as nothing if not criminal. (114)

It is undeniable that Eltit's fiction illustrates real-life practices that have become common around the globe. According to Nancy Scheper-Hughes: "The sale of human organs and tissues has resulted in certain disadvantaged individuals, populations, and even nations being reduced to the role of "suppliers." It is a scenario in which bodies are broken, transported, processed, and sold in the interests of a more socially advantaged population of organs and tissue receivers" (64). Scheper-Hughes who goes as far as calling this practice "neocannibalism," exemplifies her findings with specific occurrences in Brazil and Argentina, including the horrific account of how the Montes de Oca state mental asylum near Lujan in the province of Buenos Aires stole blood, tissue, and organs from the bodies of mentally ill, but otherwise physically healthy patients throughout the 1990s. A night nurse and ward supervisor explained: "hospital staff members commonly take blood from living inmates and remove cornea from the deceased, almost always without consent". She further justified these practices as "'payback' for the inmates' care at the state's expense" (71). In her view, the mentally ill are "bad subjects" who are taking advantage of the system and deserve repressive interventions, just like the medical personnel in Eltit's novel view the racially and class marked bodies of the mother and daughter who have lived in the hospital their whole life. Echoing the nurse's statement above, as well as the title of the novel (*Tax on Flesh*), the narrator explains the looting of her own body as a financial transaction: "Ofrecer como pago o deuda o soborno el máximo de sangre que nos queda y corresponder así al prolongado saqueo de nuestros orgános" (72). The bodies of these "bad" invisible subjects must therefore be commodified to get a financial return on the "care" that was provided and to improve the

human capital of "good responsibilized" subjects elsewhere who have the means and power to make such investments.

Gendered bodies

As with racial issues, Eltit's novel connects past and present mechanisms of discrimination and violence to show how today's free-market Chilean society continues to purposefully ignore women's voices and experiences. Indeed, the language of intense physical suffering used throughout the novel also appears to connect the corporeal pain that tortured bodies went through during the dictatorship to the suffering that certain neoliberal practices cause to the female body and to a woman's subjectivity.

First, the narrator makes it clear that the male doctors are in charge of the hospital, its management, staff, and patients. While this reflects the patriarchal nature of Chilean society since its inception, it is also representative of today's globalized economy, which profits from various forms of gender inequalities. As Eltit explains in her 2008 essay "Contante y sonante": "la economía mundial y globalizada que rige la actualidad está sustentada en la explotación virtual de un cuerpo multitudinario (las mujeres somos númericamente más que los hombres) y más allá de las desigualdades internas (la obrera vs la ejecutiva) experimentamos una misma irregularidad. Estas desigualdades salariales son ultra lucrativas para sostener los sistemas mundiales" (390). To exemplify the masculine domination of Chile's neoliberal society, Cárcamo-Huechante notes that the image of the Jaguar of South America often used by economists to refer to Chile during the 1980s is related to what Bourdieu has defined as a "neoliberal hagiography" in which "manliness is constructed in front of and for other men against femininity" (Bourdieu 53):

> El liberalismo en esta perspectiva, configuraría un patrón hegemónico no solo en términos de economía, sino que también de género (una dominación masculina). A través de la representación hiperbólica de Chile como 'el jaguar de Sudamerica' se pone así en circulación una figuración competitiva, agresiva y masculina del sujeto nacional en el era del libre Mercado. (Cárcamo 36)

Yet, the omnipotent power that the doctors enjoy in the novel's hospital/nation, especially the first one who treats the main protagonists, goes beyond the representation of gender inequalities and is especially reminiscent of Pinochet's fierce rule: " (él [el médico primero] tenía el poder o la gracia de permitir la vida y decidir la muerte)" (25). Similarly, the nurses and fans' role, while representative of the way many Chilean women over the years contributed and continue to participate in their own subjugation, is also suggestive of the military personnel, prison guards, and various supporters of the regime, who, during the dictatorship, especially mistreated fellow Chilean citizens who would not conform to dictatorial expectations.

Labeled as anarchists, the mother and daughter do not benefit from any favoritism and are in fact subjected to severe and repeated gendered violence. The narrator recounts the traumatic experience that her mother went through for what could be seen as a possible violation, a failed abortion procedure, or the birth of her daughter:

> Con una precisión documentalista, mi madre me contó que el médico, el primero que se apoderó de nuestros organismos, la miró desprectivo o no la miró, sino que se abocó a la esctructura de sus genitales y al conjunto tenso de los órganos. Lo hizo con una expresión profesionalmente opaca, distanciada. Y luego se abalanzó artero para ensañarse con ella de un modo tan salvaje que en vez de examinarla la desgarró hasta que le causó daño irreparable. Mi pobre mamá se sentía morir molecularmente y ese médico provisto de todo su poderoso instrumental le arruinó el peregrinaje ambiguo del presente y toda la esperanza que había depositado en su futuro.
>
> Por culpa del médico quedamos solas en el mundo mi mamá y yo. (13)

The verbs "apoderar,""ensañarse," "desgarrar," "causar daño," "morir," and "arruinar" highlight the violence of the event and are reminiscent of torture practices used

against perceived dissident women during the dictatorship. Furthermore, the narrator's account of the fate of her cousin, whose organs are harvested one by one by her father, a famous medical doctor, are not only suggestive of sexual abuse but also of a military regime that did not hesitate to sacrifice its own citizens for political gains: "[mi prima] era prácticamente una cáscara, solo contaba con sus partes vitales porque su padre, un médico ambicioso (sórdido, era sórdido) quería abrirse paso en el programa médico y no había dudado en saquear el cuerpo de sus hijas" (98). As I have explained in Chapter Two and in Chapter Three, gendered violence during the early regime of Augusto Pinochet and during the Argentine Dirty War included rape and forced abortions. Many detained women also gave birth in horrific conditions without ever being able to see and care for their babies. Moreover, some of these procedures, as well as others used against male and female detainees, were done at the hands of medical doctors who used their professional training to torture and carry out their government's repressive policies. According to Scott Horton: "One of the dark secrets that made the long and brutal Pinochet dictatorship so effective was its cooption of the medical profession" (n. pag.). Furthermore, it has been reported that "Under Chile's Pinochet dictatorship, from 1973 to 1981, the military junta appointed the leadership of the Chilean Medical Association, which consequently was silent about the widespread involvement of military physicians in torture" (Achtenberg n. pag.).

Although possibly the most traumatic event in the novel, the narrator's account of her mother's birthing experience is only one among many moments in which pain and suffering are described in bloody and organic terms. Throughout the novel, the narrator relies on images of gruesome and dehumanizing physical pain to denounce the exploitation of their and other female bodies: "Mujeres enfermas que mugen sus dolores, asombradas por sus trágicas amputaciones, esperando, esperando, esperando, esperando

que se curse el milagro de la cicatrización" (153). It is clear however that these physical wounds cannot heal, just as the emotional wounds inflicted during the military regime still pain many of its survivors. As many of the women die, mother and daughter desperately seek to tell their story: "tenemos la misión que acompaña a los sobrevivientes (…) debemos dar cuenta de la historia y detenernos en cada uno de los episodios turbios o en aquellos que portan una metafísica falsificada" (33). Yet, echoing the fate of women's writing over the ages and that of survivors' testimonies in the post dictatorship era, the narrator's desperate efforts to chronicle their experiences and find justice appear to remain vain: "Nunca va a circular ni un pedacito de palabra. La nación o la patria o el país van a aplastar la revuelta de la sílaba" (31). This silencing is also especially symptomatic of the market-state, which, in its constant quest for profit, demands that the past be forgotten. As Avelar explains:

> Growing commodification negates memory because new commodities must always replace previous commodities, send them to the dustbin of history. (…) The free market established by Latin American dictatorships must, (…), impose forgetting not only because it needs to erase the reminiscence of its barbaric origins, but also because it is proper to the market to live in a perpetual present. (4)

As the doctors and nurses silence their female patients by slowly killing them through the removal and sale of their body parts and fluids, Eltit shows that the tortured bodies of the mother and daughter in the novel represent a violent past that must not only be forgotten, but should also profit the present market-state. Furthermore, through her hyperbolic representation of the nation as a dysfunctional hospital, she suggests that despite a return to a peaceful democratic rule in 1990 and the ascendance of some women into prominent political positions, including the presidency in 2006 and 2014, neoliberal policies implemented during the brutal years of the dictatorship have lead to a milder type of gendered violence.

In *Bodies in Crisis* (2010), Sutton explains that following the Dirty War, the newly democratic Argentine state together with strong economic interests played an active role in institutionalizing a different kind of violence, which also affected the female body: "economic violence." In her view, this kind of violence came from the drastic structural adjustment promoted by the advocates of neoliberal globalization and their economic policies that "undermined the quality of life and survival possibilities of a large sector of the population." These measures especially affected female corporeality and increased the work burden of poor women (8). While Sutton's research focuses on the Argentine socioeconomic context, many of her findings on the bodily implications of the neoliberal economic restructuring are true for poor Chilean women too.

Indeed, Eltit's novel addresses through fiction several of the issues that Sutton observes in today's neoliberal Argentina, including the quality of obstetric care and the importance that the globalized market-society places on women's physical appearance. For both categories, the privatization of health care led to the popularization of medical and surgical procedures that are profitable for the medical community, yet not always necessary for the patients. Furthermore, these procedures are directly related to the social regulation of women's bodies.

For instance, the birthing experience in the novel is telling of the traditional Western biomedical view of childbirth as a potentially dangerous event that requires medical intervention and must occur in a hospital setting at the hands of trained doctors whose practice should not be questioned. As the narrator explains, the male doctor not only ignores his patient's suffering but adds to it by mistreating her: "El médico le realizó una terrible intervención mientras le ordenaba: No grite, no grite, cállese ahora mismo. Y mi mamá, medio muerta por la hemorragia, se entregó a su desangramiento" (13). Although Western doctors have resorted to medical and surgical assistance during

childbirth for decades and have certainly saved countless lives over the years because of it, recent advances in technologies and the advancement of women as medical doctors have not drastically improved this practice in terms of allowing women to take charge of their own deliveries and in viewing pregnancy and childbirth as a healthy and positive bodily experience. Women in Chile, as those in Argentina, have few choices about how to give birth. Sutton notes that "Mistreatment of women during birthing, the regular use of techniques that are not necessary in all cases (e.g. episiotomies, prebirthing shaving), and excessive reliance on cesarean sections, have all been documented" (7).

Eltit's description of a traumatic and bloody childbirth could therefore also be viewed as a satirical portrayal of a medical system that, due to its excessive reliance on practicing caesarean sections on rich women, has become inept at assisting poor women with natural childbirth. Indeed it has been widely reported that since the launch of private health insurance funds in the early 1981, Chile saw a dramatic increase in the practice of caesarean sections. By 1997, 40% of all birth occurred by caesarean sections in Chile, making it the highest rate in Latin America. According to a 2000 study, the caesarean rate of women with private health insurance was double that in women covered by the national health insurance fund. It also noted, that women's choice was unlikely to be the primary explanation for this high rate but rather caused by "the requirement by private health insurers that an obstetrician, rather than a midwife, should be the primary care provider; women's expectations of personalised private care relationships; and the peripatetic work schedules of many obstetricians" (Murray 1504). These factors which empower medical doctors and reward for-profit hospitals and private health insurers show how the free-market society relies on the Western biomedical model that Foucault described and that I summarized earlier in order not just to control women's bodies, but also to profit from them.

In *Impuesto a la carne*, Eltit also touches upon the subject of women's physical appearance. First and as I have explained earlier, she explicitly denounces racial discrimination and prejudices that have prevailed against indigenous populations in Chile since colonial times. The white doctor's assessment of both mother and daughter as "Bajas/feas/seriadas" is meant as both congenital and aesthetical defects (25). While I will not analyze here the complex historical factors that have contributed to notions of beauty and feminity in Chile over the past two hundred years, it is well known that nation-building discourses and actions taken by the Criollo elite over the years involved determined efforts to shape a European-like population at the expense of indigenous people deemed uncivilized and of low prestige. Western models of femininity and beauty were therefore imposed and associated with white European heritage.

While Eltit explicitly shows that these centuries-old models are still prevalent, she also implicitly demonstrates how today's Chilean female subject has fallen victim to an ever more powerful globalized yet Western-based and narrow definition of what is considered physical beauty. Upon her traumatic birth, the daughter is left with what appears to be a visibly deviated septum. Her mother and she not only feel compelled to have it fixed, but the white surgeon they consult calls her "Monstruosa" and appears to specifically work on "correcting" girls like her who do not quite fit his aesthetic mold: "unas niñas que no le gustaban nada al cirujano pero a las que debía dedicar toda su sabiduría médica para reparar y rehacer y recomponer el aura facial a su gusto y arbitrio" (22). The case of cousin Patricia who hanged herself despite her perceived beauty, her abilities to captivate the doctors, and her status as an iconic fan, is also suggestive of the social pressure under which young Chilean females are expected to look a certain way

and act at all times. Eltit herself in a 2005 interview with Mary Green[85] explains that "neoliberalism – which is clearly neomacho – positions women merely in terms of her role as a consumer. The powerful media promote anatomical 'woman-body' not only stripped of thought but caught up in the industry of plastic surgery." She adds that in Chile, "hospital theatres opened up for plastic surgery with no kind of monitoring or control" and notes the hypocrisy of a system that advertises "toxic" food that lead to growing levels of obesity while simultaneously promoting an "official image of woman as androgynous" that results in a huge increase in bulimia and anorexia ("*Dialogue*" 168). It seems therefore that the increasing commercial exhibition of white, thin, sexualized female bodies in the media, as well as the invasion of consumerism that started to occur as a result of neoliberal policies in the late 1980s and intensified when the transition to democracy started in 1990 have unhelpfully influenced existing constructions of feminity and have further marginalized the racialized Chilean female body.

The various ways in which the hospital/nation in Eltit's novel excludes and profits from its patients/citizens' bodies based on their race, gender, and class therefore shows how neoliberal and globalization economic processes perpetuate and are dependent upon a hierarchy of bodies that has existed in Chile and globally for centuries. Moreover, by linking the corporal violence and suffering experienced by perceived dissidents during the recent dictatorship to the physical depletion and commodification of those unable to conform to today's free-market expectations, Eltit not only denounces the dictatorial origins of current neoliberal policies in Chile, but also points to the vulnerability of citizens under both authoritarian dictatorship and free-market democracy. While democracy has brought freedom and an end to the horrifying practices used during the

[85] Mary Green lectures in Hispanic Studies at Swansea University and is the author of the 2007 *Diamela Eltit: Reading the Mother* as well as various articles on Eltit's work. Eltit dedicated *Impuesto a la carne* to her.

dictatorship, through her exaggerated vision of the nation as a dysfunctional hospital, Eltit suggests that both political structures not only resort to effective techniques and a rhetoric of biopower in order to achieve the subjugation and control of marginalized bodies, but she also hints to the fact that, while clearly being the preferred repressive method during the dictatorship, direct physical violence, albeit in a much subdued and different form, still happens under neoliberal democratic rule.

In this sense, she presents a hospital/nation that is in a permanent state of exception[86] in which the law of the land (the constitution) and the neoliberal policies both created under Pinochet's totalitarian regime have become a prolonged state of being. This extended state of exception operates in her for-profit hospital/nation to deprive some individuals of their organs, citizenship, and human rights. Furthermore, by representing time in which past, present, and future coincide into a "perpetual present" of violence, abuses, and suffering reminiscent of what occurred during Pinochet's regime, Eltit also indicates that the various historical crises and events that Chile went through since its inception culminated in the Pinochet dictatorship and today's sustained state of exception.

MATERNAL/FEMALE BODIES AS SITES OF RESISTANCE

While Eltit's narrative demonstrates how the racialized female body is subjected to material and rhetorical abuse under dictatorship, as well as within democracy, she also highlights the fact that it is more than a site of oppression. Indeed, by focusing on

[86] This concept is loosely based on Giorgio Agamben's 2003 book *State of Exception*. In an interview with Ulrich Raulff, Agamben explains: "the state of exception or state of emergency has become a paradigm of government today. Originally understood as something extraordinary, an exception, which should have validity only for a limited period of time, but a historical transformation has made it the normal form of governance." Agamben uses the Nazi camps and Guantánamo as examples of states of exception (609).

subjugated and mutilated bodies, she also shows that resistance is grounded in the body itself. Despite centuries of abuses, mother and daughter are still alive and it is the daughter's emphasis on their physical pain that brings to light the body's potential to adapt and resist economic, political, cultural, and medical violence and discourses that cast it as a mere commodity. Furthermore, it is through the body and by narrating their physical experience that the daughter, following her mother's anarchic tradition, is able to tell their story and verbalize her intention to write it someday: "Voy a escribir pausadamente los hechos que conocemos para dejar por escrito su importancia y su existencia. Voy a escribir con la voz de mi madre clavada en mis riñones o prendida en mi pulmón más competente. Voy a escribir la memoria del desvalor" (155). Mother's and daughter's embodied memory of the past two hundred years of oppressive and discriminatory practices against racialized, gendered, and lower-class groups serves therefore as counter-memory and counter-discourse to the official (hi)story of Chile that was put forward by political and economic forces over the years, specifically in regards to the past forty years and especially during the Bicentennial celebrations of 2010.

The fact that the mother lives within her daughter's body also denotes a powerful familial relationship that grants them both a maternal corporeality. Their common birth, close relationship, and communal body point to what Luce Irigaray sees as a patriarchal vision of the mother-daughter relationship as shared subjecthood: "The mother always remains too familiar and too close. In a way, the daughter has her mother under her skin, secreted in the deep, damp intimacy of the body, the mystery of her relationship to gestation, to birth, and to her sexual identity" (98). Yet, it is precisely their close mother/daughter bond and maternal body that make them a "micro-comunidad" able to survive and resist longstanding patriarchal oppression at the hand of the state (Richard, "Alegoría" 381). Furthermore, through the daughter's voice and willingness to write their

ordeal despite her mother's disapproval, it becomes clear that both mother and daughter are individual subjects. Through their shared physical space but without idealization, Eltit therefore presents a familial relationship that alters the Western cultural norm that erases the mother-daughter link and patriarchal practice that views them as one subject.

Eltit's familial representation in the novel also defies the traditional notion of the family. Green explains that, "The institutions of motherhood and the family were of huge symbolic importance during the periods of the dictatorship and redemocratization in Chile. (…) The military junta sought to unite the ideological nucleus of the family through the glorification of woman as wife and mother" (*Diamela* 4). Richard further notes that these traditional social values did not change during the Transition period in which influential Catholic beliefs led to "una fuerte política normativizadora que censura sexualidades, cuerpos e identidades" (*Residuos* 204). As an emphasis on the importance of the family remained a strong political argument in the postdictatorship period, Kemy Oyarzún also points to the "contradictory position of celebrating the social progress that is supposedly inherent to neo-liberal values while at the same time sustaining archaic roles" (qtd. in Green, *Diamela* 7). While the concept of nationhood in the novel ("la patria") is that of patriarchy, as has been the case throughout history and especially during the dictatorship period, the mother/daughter family unit does not include a paternal figure and as such challenges the predominant Chilean nationalist discourse that still views the nuclear family as a married heterosexual couple and their children.

Furthermore, the maternal role portrayed in the novel is nontraditional, since it is the daughter who is carrying the mother inside of her, and not the other way around. The daughter's body thus hosts within past, present, and future. It is her body that enables her mother to keep on living. Yet, the daughter is also dependent upon her mother's past experience to survive the present. At the same time, the mother's menacing and

discouraging comments to her daughter in regards to her plan to write their story and seek justice symbolize a long-standing lack of confidence in women's ability to subvert the system and an unconscious passivity and complicity on their part in maintaining and propagating patriarchal and authoritarian values over the years: "Tendrías que ser tonta o retardada, me dice mi mamá, para profanar la burbuja histórica de la nación, del país o de la patría médica, así que te repito, cállate la boca y déjalos en paz, que hagan lo que quieran, lo que se le antoje" (35). Yet the daughter's narration in the present tense and her firm intentions to eventually testify to their ordeal in writing open up a space for woman's self expression and retaliation that expands her maternal role beyond traditional responsibilities.

The maternal communal body shared by mother and daughter in the novel is also a symbol of deep connection between human beings, a connection that rarely exists in today's individualistic neoliberal society. Echoing Julia Kristeva's analysis of the maternal body with its two-in-one or other within, Eltit uses it as a model for subjective relations. As Kristeva explains "It is in motherhood that the link to the other can become love" (9). Yet, motherhood, or "the maternal function" as Kristeva also calls it, should not be viewed as limited to mother or woman. As the Bulgarian-French philosopher suggests in "Motherhood According to Bellini," anyone can fulfill this function, men or women. This is also reminiscent of Sara Ruddick's definition of mothering as a practice and collective human activity separate from the identity of the mother. According to Ruddick, to engage in maternal practice is "to be committed to meeting the demands that define maternal work. (…) The three demands for preservation, growth, and social acceptance constitute maternal work; to be a mother is to be committed to these demands by work of preservative love, nurturance and training" (19). While Eltit does not idealize the mother/daughter relationship or even the maternal function in the novel, the

possibility for connection, love, and survival that the reciprocal mother/daughter's corporeality offers represents a hopeful sign of a more just and inclusive society in which people would actively care for and about each other.

In her presentation of Eltit's novel, Richard also alludes to the nurturing opportunities of the mother/daughter bond:

> Frente a la gran escala del capitalismo planetario, la pequeña escala de esta micro-comunidad de la sangre y de los orgános responde a la máquina deseante de un *estar-en-conjunto* que se vuelve abarcador y multiplicativo. Un estar-en-conjunto que se apoya en las figuras asociativas de la mutual y del mutualismo, para favorecer la reciprocidad de la ayuda entre desprotegidos. ("Alegoría" 381)

According to Judith Butler, "seeing ourselves as socially vulnerable is integral to beginning to share loss and grief as communities" and "feeling shared intercorporeality through vulnerability is critical to this challenge" (qtd. in Palmer 19). The togetherness that Richard alludes to and the recognition of our "corporeal vulnerability" as represented in the novel point thus to fundamental elements for the development of new ethical relations and practices that might potentially transcend violence.

Therefore, despite a pessimistic ending in which the narrator predicts that their dead body will serve as ground fertilizer in a distant Chinese cemetery, it is through their communal maternal body that mother and daughter offer a glimpse of hope for the advent of a new ethical and social movement, a "mutual del cuerpo y de la sangre," that might protect marginalized bodies from and stand against the abuses of the neoliberal paradigm: "en la patria de mi cuerpo o en la nación de mi cuerpo o en el territorio de mi cuerpo, mi madre por fin estableció su comuna. Se instaló una comuna en mí rodeada de órganos que se levantan para protestar por el estado de su historia. (…) pronto iniciaremos la huelga de nuestros líquidos y el paro social de nuestras materias" (183-84). While allusions to "comuna" (commune), "mutual" (union) and "huelga" (strike) might be perceived as

nostalgia for a type of pre-dictatorship socialism, the novel never idealizes any period of Chile's history and, although the current neoliberal order was first implemented during the Pinochet regime and has since permeated every corner of Chilean society, Eltit's two-hundred-year-old characters make it clear that neoliberalism is the culmination of a capitalist order that started during colonial times.

The organic union that the narrator alludes to therefore is about making a direct use of our corporeality and practicing mothering to challenge existing power structures and become what Sutton calls an "activist body" (205). As Richard notes about the novel's main characters: "Ambas quieren reapropiarse del cuerpo de la nación, re-nacionalizar el cuerpo de la patria, y también, hacer del cuerpo propio, el de la revolución de los órganos, una zona de resistencia tenaz al capitalismo intensivo" (Richard, "Alegoría" 379). In her book, Sutton explains that activists in Argentina use the phrase "poner el cuerpo" to express that bodies are relevant to political contestation and that "activist engagement itself entails embodied actions and dispositions that may contribute to changing how the body, and life in general, is experienced by activists" (205). Eltit who has stated in an interview that "the majority of organizations that challenged the dictatorship were led by women" and that "the result of the plebiscite that brought about the electoral majority against Pinochet was due to the votes of women" clearly believes in the changing power of activism (Green, "Dialogue" 167). Yet, she also notes that these women were excluded from the new political pact when the transition to democracy began and that there has been a dissolution of the militancy of women's activism since 1990 (167). The narrator's hope for a "comuna del cuerpo" that could "poner en marcha la primera sede anarquista para contener la sangre del país o de la nación" therefore brings into focus the urgent need for a renewed type of activism in which marginalized bodies unite and resist together as the only possible and significant action to denounce the

embodied nature of social injustice created and reinforced through neoliberalism, to challenge long-lasting state and economic violence, and to start a process of decolonization that might finally bring about social equality and justice.

Conclusions

In this dissertation, I looked at the creative ways in which Kozameh and Eltit write the female body to, at once, represent a corporeality that, until recently, has rarely been expressed in Latin American literature, and reconstruct a body that has either been traumatized by recent state-sponsored violence or commodified by the current neoliberal system. I showed that both authors position the marginalized and usually silenced Latin American female body at the center of their narrative in a non-erotic fashion that differs from most representations of Latin American female corporeality, and that takes into account markings of class and race in a Southern Cone, yet globalized, context. In addition, I argued that the focus of these authors on the materiality of the female body goes beyond countering male dominance and the specificity of women's rights, since it allows them to openly condemn the violence that occurred during and in the aftermath of recent dictatorships in Chile and Argentina, and to expose how traumatic memories impact female bodies. Finally, my examination of the vivid expressions of physical and emotional pain experienced by the female characters in Kozameh's *Pasos bajo el agua* and *Ofrenda de propia piel*, as well as in Eltit's *Jamás el fuego nunca* and *Impuesto a la carne*, showed that, in spite of long-lasting suffering, female corporeality emerges as an opportunity for survival, resistance, and subversion at the individual and community levels. The attention that Kozameh and Eltit draw to the physical body is therefore useful to understand broader Argentine and Chilean social, political, and economic issues and, as such, has direct ethical relevance.

I started this study by introducing current theoretical approaches to the body and looked specifically at Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological and Foucault's genealogical views on embodied subjectivity. I explained that, while in recent Latin American

literature, female corporeality has typically been represented in terms of erotic experiences or sexual pleasure, Kozameh's and Eltit's narrative is almost devoid of eroticism and focuses primarily on the trauma caused by rape, torture, prolonged imprisonment, and fear. Furthermore, I demonstrated that such an approach to female corporeal experiences allows for broader connections from the feminine to other marginalized bodies also suffering discrimination and social inequality in Latin America.

In Chapter Two, I showed that Kozameh writes the lived body into her novel and short stories as a powerful counter-discourse to the one that the military manipulated to define and eradicate "subversive" bodies. It is through her focus on the materiality of the body that she denounces past oppression, documents physical acts of resistance, and testifies to the challenges of surviving traumatic experiences. Furthermore, by placing the traumatized female body at the center of her narrative, she also challenges the civil state's discourse of reconciliation that, in its effort to forget past violence, denies recognition and justice for those who survived torture and imprisonment. Finally, through her writing of the female body, she moves toward the construction of a collective identity that values intersubjectivity and becomes a crucial component of the personal reconstruction and healing of her characters.

In the first part of my analysis, I focused on Kozameh's representation of the lived body as the simultaneous site of destruction and reconstruction. I looked at how violence, detention, and forced exile impacted the prisoners' bodies, especially Sara's, both physically and emotionally. While the fragmented representation of the body alludes to torture and communicates suffering, body parts remain intact and appear to be essential components of a mass body that, as a collectivity, powerfully resists violence and detention. I also showed that while the memory of trauma is engraved on Sara's body and severely affects her reality, it also provides opportunities for reconstructing herself

through new mapping and understanding of her world. Finally, as her body first actively resists freedom and exile through tangible physical and emotional symptoms, it is eventually in and from those spaces that she creates her new identity as a survivor and shares her experience.

In the second part of my analysis, I concentrated specifically on Kozameh's writing of the female body. I analyzed her representation of an unidealized and marginalized Argentine corporeality, one that is rarely seen in literature and that is shunned by society. I showed how the women in her texts develop strategies of collective resistance and survival through disseminating and reproducing culture, including the creation of a living library and theatrical performances, as well as through caring for each other and each other's babies. Through these interactions, they reclaim their own bodies and redefine values such as sharing, nurturing, motherhood, and family that are at the chore of their own community, but that the patriarchal state has appropriated and manipulated to promote its repressive agenda. Finally, I argued that Kozameh's representation of the female body goes beyond denouncing gender discrimination, since it also allows for the construction of a collective feminist consciousness that imagines community differently and supports these prisoners in their efforts to find healing and liberation from the violence that they went through and the prejudice that they continue to experience as women and as survivors.

As does Kozameh in the aforementioned texts, Eltit attests in *Jamás el fuego nunca* and in *Impuesto a la carne* that human suffering resides and is felt first and foremost in the body. In Chapter Three, I showed that it is through the deterioration and physical pain of the characters in *Jamás el fuego nunca* that we are able to reconstruct the unofficial version of Chile's totalitarian past, as well as the dark side of its present democratic society. I stressed the connections between suffering and gender to show how

the female body becomes aware of its subordination through physical pain. I also explained how being in pain forces the characters into a survival mode and how this has become a way of life for those who were not and still are not on the "right" side of the dominant political and economic systems in Chile. I justified my arguments by closely analyzing the ways Eltit focuses primarily on the corporeality of her characters and effectively gives a voice to their physical suffering, showing that most experiences are first felt in the body.

First, through an analysis of the male character's deteriorating body, I explained how his unconditional devotion and lifelong commitment to a cause that failed to materialize led him to immerse himself in his physical pains in order to annihilate the disappointment and emotions caused by the collapse and proved unsuitability of his Marxist ideals. These were not just defeated in Chile by the dictatorship, but were overpowered by capitalism around the globe after being attempted, misused, seriously questioned, and ultimately discarded in the last decade of the twentieth century with the fall of Communism. The breaking down of his body is thus a metaphor for the slow death of his ideals and those of an entire generation of Chileans who fought and fell for their dream of a society that would prioritize justice and social equality over capital and materialism.

Secondly, I defended that it is through the violent physical pain of rape and childbirth that the narrator became aware of the sexual specificity and the vulnerability of her female body. These physical traumas, as well as the death of her son, pushed her into a state of intense and lasting melancholic pain in which, unable to clearly verbalize her experiences, she painfully tries to make sense of her past. Through her chaotic memories, her constant questioning of the past, and her anger toward her partner, she is able to denounce the discrimination and subordination that she endured both socially as a

Marxist militant and detainee, as well as privately with her partner, ultimately demonstrating that she suffered equally from both instances. Thus through her individual pain she is able to communicate that of many Chilean women who during the dictatorship were tortured based on their gender, became pregnant as a result of rape, or lost a child under unknown circumstances. Her fragmented interior monologue and desperate search for meaning draw attention to the silent suffering and survival guilt that many in her situation still experience to this day.

Finally, I showed that through the narrator's descriptions and control over the abjected, aged, and deteriorating bodies of the elderly she cares for, we are uncomfortably reminded of our own biological nature. Due to the pain and deterioration that these aged bodies experience, they have lost their subjectivity and dignity. This dehumanized vision points to the marginalization of old age in today's society, which not only fears aging and thus avoids or sanitizes its representations, but also is slowly denying the elderly, especially the poor, indispensable governmental funding for adequate pension and health care programs through neoliberal policies that promote individual responsibility. Through the individual physical pain of her characters, Eltit thus narrates the collective yet silenced story of those who, abused during the dictatorship, are condemned in the neoliberal democratic state to survive and die on the margins.

As was the case in *Jamás el fuego nunca*, the emphasis on the main characters' bodily experiences in *Impuesto a la carne,* which I analyzed in Chapter Four, offers a valuable location from which to recognize and better understand human and social suffering. Indeed, by placing the lived body at the center of her novel, Eltit echoes other feminist scholars who view it as "the first place that defines political struggle" (Harcourt 37). In general terms, her novel acknowledges the enduring anguish of marginalized

populations in Chile who have experienced and continue to experience violence due to local historical, political, and social contexts, while at the same time recognizing the significant yet silenced role that they play, as many other vulnerable groups in Latin America do, in the recent expansion of a globalized free-market economic system that exploits them. Furthermore, Eltit shows that concepts of race, gender, and social class, rather than being seen as separate, isolated, or cumulative must be viewed as elements that simultaneously continue to shape the lived experiences of women; thus illustrating an argument that many Latin American feminist scholars as well as women of color in the US and around the globe have defended in recent years.

My reading of *Impuesto a la carne* focused on how Eltit, through her portrayal of an omnipotent medical institution and a rhetoric of illness and corporeal suffering proper to Western biomedical models, points to methods of social control that enable the free-market state to shape and control docile bodies. Yet, I also showed that she simultaneously denounces the continued importance of direct physical violence as a way to silence marginalized bodies and dehumanize them as mere commodities. I identified clear connections between the physical depletion and commodification of racialized and gendered bodies by white male doctors in Eltit's hospital/nation, and the extreme state violence experienced by perceived dissidents during the dictatorship, as well as new forms of economic violence that affected the most vulnerable populations as a result of neoliberal policies that were implemented by Pinochet and were expanded by subsequent democratic governments. I argued that, through these connections, Eltit demarcates Pinochet's authoritarian rule as the culmination of two hundred years of discriminatory practices in Chile and offers a counter-version of her country's history to the one told and sold by political and economic forces that have chosen to forget Chile's violent past, especially during the Bicentennial celebrations of 2010. Most importantly, she rescues

the painful memory of the dictatorship to remind us that some of its tenets are still in effect under today's democratic rule and are responsible for deep social inequalities among Chilean citizens.

Finally, I interpreted Eltit's focus on the mother/daughter communal and maternal body as a sign of unified resistance and mutual compassion against the individualistic and patriarchal nature of today's neoliberal society that is driven by profit. Through the remembrance and verbalization of their common physical suffering, the daughter is able to sustain her mother and keep them both alive. Her "mothering" practice and activism should therefore be seen as a powerful hint of hope for collective actions and efforts by marginalized communities to successfully challenge long-lasting state and economic violence and start a process of decolonization that might finally bring about social recognition, equality, and justice.

In conclusion, Kozameh's and Eltit's literature powerfully writes bodies that have been traumatized by violence, and at once represent types of female corporeal experiences that are atypical in the Argentine and Chilean literary canon. Their texts explore women's agency by representing counter-hegemonic bodies, relations, and values that challenge patriarchal discourse primarily under dictatorship, but also under democracy. The centrality of the living body in their writing enables them to manifest their fervent commitment, first as survivors and witnesses of Chile's and Argentina's totalitarian regimes, to denounce state-sponsored gendered violence, preserve the memory of the disappeared, and honor the life of victims of state terrorism; and secondly as women and writers to provide a fuller understanding of female corporeality in Latin America.

While the scope of this study did not allow for the inclusion of other authors, the exploration of the representation of the lived body in recent works by a younger

generation of female writers from the Southern Cone is a logical continuation of this project. Some critics, including Mónica Barrientos, have already observed the centrality of the body as a critical factor in works by Chilean authors Lina Meruane (b. 1970) and Nona Fernández (b. 1971) for example.[87] As Eltit and Kozameh drew on events and experiences they witnessed or lived through as adults during the Pinochet regime and the Dirty War to represent, in novel ways, the materiality, vulnerability, and resilience of female corporeality, authors such as Meruane and Fernández, who were children during the worst years of state-sponsored terrorism, are influenced by different lived experiences and offer distinct approaches to these violent years and their aftermath. Yet, their representations of female corporeality that, for the most part, focuses on suffering and resistance share similarities to that of Eltit and Kozameh.

Indeed, while younger female writers in Argentina and Chile might not address the violence of the dictatorship period per se, their discursive approach to the lived body has not only been influenced by those who wrote to denounce gendered violence under dictatorship, but can also be seen as a condemnation of violent practices that occur presently under democracy. As illustrated in Eltit's *Impuesto a la carne*, the free-market economic and social policies implemented under dictatorship have yielded various dramatic situations in which bodies, especially female ones, have fallen victim to a capitalist model that encourages organ and human trafficking, among other abuses. As noted by Sutton in *Bodies in Crisis*, gendered violence and the discourse that accompanies it in today's neoliberal Argentina share similarities to those in place during the dictatorship. From the numerous women who disappeared by way of trafficking networks, the "desaparecidas en democracia" as Argentine activists against the

[87] See "Sujeto, cuerpo y texto: Una mirada a la producción narrativa de escritoras chilenas de los últimos años" (2009) by Mónica Barrientos.

trafficking of women and girls call them, to the ones murdered or abused under democracy using techniques that evoke the experiences of state terrorism, female bodies are still central targets of many forms of aggression. It is therefore my hope that the theoretical and close-reading approach I used for this study will be useful for the analysis of other texts by writers who through their art expose, as Eltit and Kozameh do, the embodied nature of our time's social, economic, and political issues. As I conclude this study, I am encouraged by an ever-abundant literary production, especially that of crónicas, that reveal the physical and psychological pain felt by so many as a result of poverty, migration, and drug trafficking for example; and it is clear that the literary representations and cultural studies of marginalized, wounded, disabled, and aging bodies from other contemporary social, political, and cultural contexts has gained recognition in recent Latin American letters. It is by exposing the embodied nature of injustice and through embodied acts of resistance that equality and justice can be achieved.

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